



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

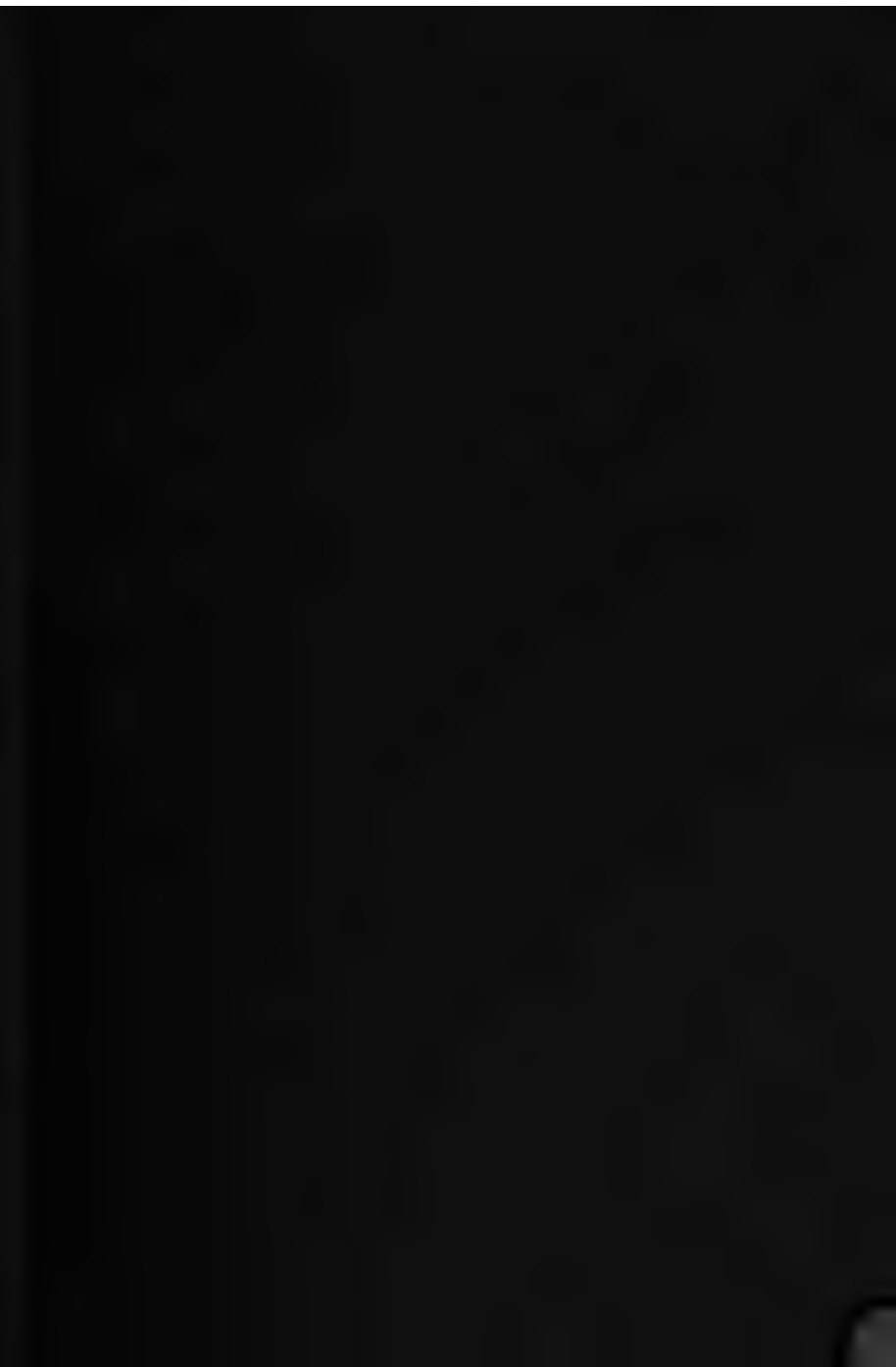
Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

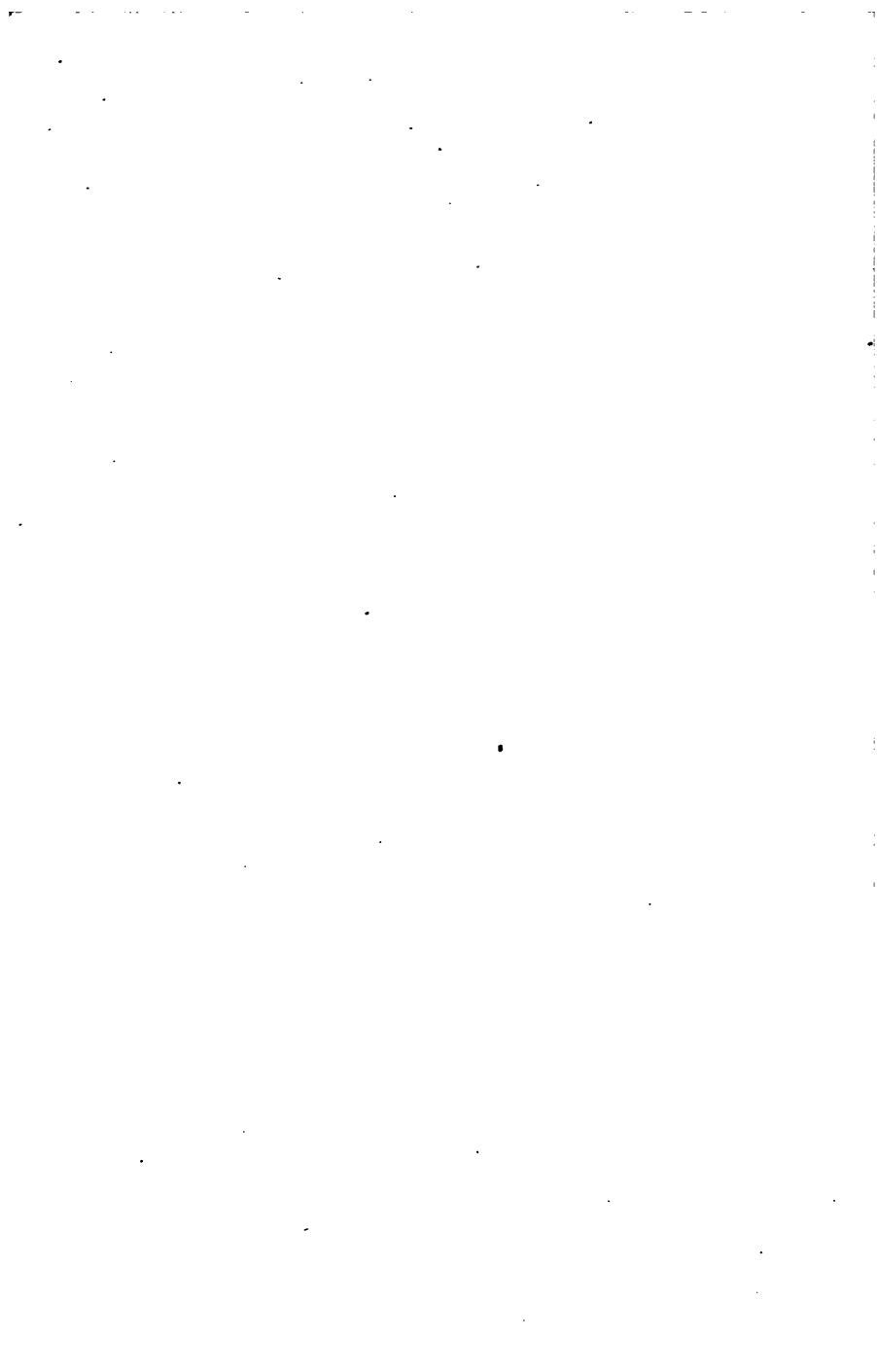




600073381S







SPELL-BOUND.

VOL. II.



SPELL-BOUND.

BY

ALICE KING,

AUTHOR OF

“QUEEN OF HERSELF,”

“THE WOMAN WITH A SECRET,”

&c., &c.

“All that is healthily pleasant, is useful.”

HENRY MORLEY.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON:

HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,

13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1874.

All rights reserved.

251. b. 352.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND EVERTS,
BLENHEIM HOUSE.

SPELL-BOUND.

CHAPTER I.

THE SEARCH.

IT was rather a long storm for a tropical one, still it was comparatively soon over. In a wonderfully short space of time all was again calm and bright. The rain ceased as suddenly as it had begun. The thunder died away into a distant mutter. The wind sank, and murmured softly among the trees, as though it were tired, and were singing itself to sleep. The sky was once more clear. The stars looked out

like angels' eyes. The silver moon sailed in calm majesty up the heavens.

The tent had been blown down, as Oakleigh had foreseen it would be, but none of the little party, nor even any of their horses, had been injured in the storm. The nurse and child were not, however, come back. The negro who had been sent to look for them had been much too frightened to do anything but go a few yards, and then come back howling dismally. Oakleigh now begged his wife to return as quickly as she could on horseback, with two of the servants, to their boat on the river, where she would be able to get dry clothes, while he and the rest of the men went in search of the nurse and child.

"Oh! Frederick," she cried, wildly, "for pity's sake let me go with you. I shall find her quicker than anyone."

Soon seeing that it was impossible to persuade her, he let her have her own way. The night was warm. The moon shed down a mild heat. Oakleigh knew that his wife could not be as much injured as she would have been in a colder climate. He therefore made her drink a little brandy out of his pocket-flask, and then they all moved forward.

They turned up the track along which the nurse had gone. Stella went first, and went so quickly that the men had quite enough to do to keep up. Her face was deadly pale. Her lips were pressed together as if to keep back at once words of trembling hope and words of anguish. In her eyes there was a light as though her soul were so eager to know what news those eyes would have to tell, that it had come into them, and was sitting in anxious



600073381S

ed, and put it down softly again among the long grass. The wet branches kissed her as she passed. Sometimes there lay across the path a large tree blown down by the wind. Her husband then would hurry forward to help her, but almost before he could reach her she had stepped lightly over it.

For a long time they followed the track which the nurse and child had taken, but found no trace of them. At length Stella turned despairingly to her companions,

"They could not have gone further than this," she cried.

"Let us try another track, madam," said Pierre, Mr. Oakleigh's shrewd, active French servant, who was an old South American traveller. "When people get frightened by a thunder-storm in the forest, they often lose their way."

SPELL-BOUND.

VOL. II.

her example with renewed vigour. For a long while, upheld by hope, the mother continued her search ; but when, after all her efforts, not a sound of the baby voice met her ear, nor even a fragment of the child's dress her eyes, despair once more laid a heavy hand upon her ; and, exhausted both in body and mind, she sank insensible into the arms of those around her.

Her husband bent over her and kissed her, as she lay there so still and fair in the moonlight ; and when he raised his head her face was wet, but not with the rain-drops which fell so thickly from the trees. Then he gave her into the charge of Pierre, and two of the other men, to convey her back to the boat, while he and the rest went on with the search. He could not give it up yet, for hope is a plant of strong growth in a father's heart. And indeed there was

still some reason for hope. Near where the nurse's body was found there were no signs to give the slightest idea of any violence having been done to the child, and so few people passed through the forest it seemed unlikely that she could have been picked up.

Carefully, gently Pierre and his companions bore Stella, who was a favourite with them all, towards the river. As they went along a hollow sound, as of earth being thrown up, met their ears. They crossed themselves and muttered an Ave, for they were passing by the spot where two of their number, whom Pierre, with the tact of his nation, had caused instantly and quietly to carry away poor Rhoda's body out of Mr. and Mrs. Oakleigh's sight, were hastily burying it.

When they reached the boat they gave

Stella into the care of Kitty, her little English maid, who had been brought up at Mr. Sparshaw's village school, and who, since Mrs. Oakleigh married, had served her faithfully and well. Kitty put her mistress to bed as comfortably as she could under the circumstances, and by dint of different restoratives, at length managed to bring her back to consciousness. She, however, only opened her eyes for two or three minutes, stared bewilderedly around her, and said, "Oh, Kitty, I feel so tired; I have had such horrible dreams!" then fell into a feverish sleep.

Next morning, when Stella was fully awake and had collected her thoughts, she remembered all that had happened, not as a dark vision, but as a too distinct reality.

After her mind had gone slowly through this process, the next thing she became

aware of was that her husband was sitting near her. His back was turned to her, but in a little looking-glass, which hung on the other side of the tiny cabin, she could see his face, and could at once read there that the child was not found. The tears came fast and quick into the mother's eyes. But the second look she cast at the mirror made her for the moment almost forget her own sorrow. On that face, generally so full of bright active life, there was a hopeless gloom, which touched the wife even more than the thought that she should never hear her child's baby-laughter again. Softly she rose and threw some clothes around her. Softly (though she was so weak that she moved with difficulty) she crept towards him; nor did he know that she was so near till she fell upon his breast, crying out,

“Oh, dearest, we have still each other. Since it is God’s will to take our darling from us, let us try to learn together to say, His will be done! Perhaps even in this life He may one day give her back to us again.”

Then she looked up at him, and actually smiled one of her old bright smiles. That effort and that smile were, however, too much for her, and she once more lay insensible in his arms.

But her high woman’s mission to comfort and to strengthen was fully done. He felt that he had as yet not sought enough his God in his trouble. He felt that in the egotism of his own intense grief he had been forgetful of that of his wife. He felt that a strong man should stand up bravely to meet every sorrow.

After that Stella was very ill ; so ill that

for a while her life was almost despaired of. Her mind and body had both had a shock from which they could with difficulty recover.

Fortunately for herself and her husband, they had true friends near them in that foreign land. The doctor who travelled with the expedition, a young German, with a weakness for bawling out "Die Wacht am Rhein" amid a cloud of tobacco-smoke, and for talking misty nonsense about everything, from the creation of man downward, but with nevertheless a kind heart and steady hand in his profession, was soon at Stella's bedside; and the whole party, who were none of them far off, were before long around Oakleigh, doing all they could to comfort and help him.

The Frau Professorinn came with her gold spectacles, her double chin, and her copy of "The Sorrows of Werther," which

she was always reading, and always crying over, and established herself as head-nurse. This good lady had two rules of duty in this life. One was to worship her Herr Professor, and the other was to do as much good as she could to her fellow-men. True, for the former she was too ready to neglect the latter. Had she come on the scene of a railway accident, and found her Professor with one of his fat fingers dislocated, she would not have heeded much everybody else around her having a broken limb. But as she now knew that that dear man was safe and sound not many yards off, sitting in an odour of stale tobacco and fresh onions, surrounded by a crowd of natural history curiosities, each one more hideous than its fellow, she devoted herself very warmly to her work of love towards little Stella. She sobbed

and laughed by turns over the story of her own courtship by the Professor, which she poured into the willing ear of Kitty, in strange English. She was inexhaustible in expedients for the comfort of the patient. She had always a cheery smile ready for poor Oakleigh, and was never without a word of chaff for the young doctor. In short, she acted the part, if not of a sister; at least of a charming old mother of charity.

Stella's mind often wandered a good deal. Sometimes she would repeat over and over again for an hour together, "Is it a bird, or is it a child? Whichever it is, it is dead, dead, dead!" Or her delirium would take a more lively turn, and she would prattle to Monica, or some of her old school-companions, about the trimming of her blue dress, or Miss De

Vellembie's new bonnet, or that horrid difficult bit in the German grammar. Now and then she awoke the Frau Professorinn from a doze, and made that soft-hearted lady cry like the rain, by suddenly in the night sitting up in bed, rocking a pillow in her arms, and singing to it little baby-songs, as if it were her child.

The agonized suspense in which Oakleigh lived while his wife thus lay on the verge between this world and the next, blunted in some measure his grief for the loss of his child. He felt that Stella had never been so precious to him as she now was, and that, after all, half his love for the child had sprung out of his love for the mother. Throughout this period of terrible anxiety he could not give his attention to making, with regard to the child, any wider inquiries; the object

of which would have been to learn, if possible, who, on that evening, had passed that way along those forest tracks.

At length Stella, what with her healthy young constitution, and what with the good care they gave her, struggled back to life.

CHAPTER II.

TOGETHER AGAIN.

FIVE years have passed since Armine Marani ran away from his uncle. We left him in Mrs. Penlewin's house, and we find him there still. That lady had first been persuaded by pity to let him stay the night. Then she had allowed him to remain a few days while Wilford, whom Monica enlisted in the boy's cause, wrote to his uncle to learn if his story were true. Next she had granted a little more time while another letter was despatched to Brinkworth, asking if they might put the

boy in some orphanage, which was answered in the affirmative. After that many months had passed without a place falling vacant in any of the orphanages at which they applied. Finally, Mrs. Penlewin, partly because she had grown fond of the boy and liked to hear his merry whistle in the garden and his light step on the stairs—partly because her kind old heart could not bear the thought of sending him back to be miserable with his relations—partly because she was glad to see Wilford and Monica with an object of common interest, such as Armine had become to them—but chiefly, perhaps, because long ago she had had a son of her own, whom she had lost at about Armine's age, resolved to ask his grandmother's and uncle's consent for the child to remain with her; a consent that was very readily given.

The mother and son were beginning to find that after all more was to be made out of their fertile brains than out of the North Devon soil. As they were going to give up their farm, Armine could be only a useless encumbrance to them, and they therefore resigned him gladly enough entirely to Mrs. Penlewin.

The old lady had, as has been before said, a comfortable income, out of which her always rather economical habits had enabled her to lay by considerably, and she could therefore well afford to gratify her heart in this matter. So Armine grew up at Monica's feet and in Charles Wilford's study—for the curate, to please Monica (he would have brought up a young gorilla or an infant boa-constrictor on that condition), undertook, gratis, to be the boy's tutor.

The clergyman and the old and young lady were all fond of the boy and proud of him, but the bond was strongest between him and Monica. Armine respected Mr. Wilford, who led him so patiently and cheerfully up the hill of the Classics, and who taught him to twine his rich but delicate southern nature around a firm stem of manly English feeling. He loved Mrs. Penlewin, who had taken him, the orphan, to her home and heart, who boxed his ears, it is true, sometimes, when he played her mischievous tricks, such as painting Snowball like a zebra and putting salt in the tea-pot, but who in general petted him and treated him as if he were a favourite grandson. But Monica he adored.

He would often sit silently at her feet while she read or wrote, looking up at her with wondering eyes, as though she were a

being from some higher sphere. One word from her had more power with him than a stern reprimand from Wilford or a lecture from Mrs. Penlewin. And it was well for Armine that Monica had this influence over him, for as the depressing effects of those sad days spent in his uncle's house gradually passed away from his character, the boy's nature began to show a good deal of the fire and quick impulsiveness of his native south, and he was just the sort of lad who wants the gentle guidance of a woman's hand.

But the most remarkable thing about Armine was the decided talent he showed for his father's art. The moment the boy took up a chisel, it seemed to fit into his hand as if it had grown there. Wilford showed some of Armine's early efforts to a friend of his, who was a sculptor of some

little name. The artist, who was no churlish shutter-up of the gates of his own profession against every new-comer, was pleased and interested, and offered to take the boy on moderate terms as a pupil when he should be fifteen, and to this both Wilford and Armine readily agreed.

Monica was climbing up the ladder of literature—slowly, it is true, but as she made some advance, she had ceased to torment herself with doubts as to whether she was on her right path in life. She loved her art with all a true artist's single-hearted love, and for better for worse she resolved to cling to it.

As for Charles Wilford, he still went on working in his parish, and silently loving Monica, like the true-hearted, foolish fellow that he was. Mrs. Penlewin was beginning in her secret soul to think it rather

a pleasant thing to have a niece whose writings were printed, but outwardly she still mocked at Monica's talking about her profession, and she also had not given up the hope of seeing her one day Mrs. Wilford.

Stella and her husband had stayed in South America some time after the expedition with which they went out had come home. Oakleigh was drawn on by that love of his profession which after a while had soothed to rest, though it could not kill, his sorrow for his child's loss, and which made it impossible for him to leave the world of wonder around him. Stella followed him willingly, partly because she knew that he would be miserable if he did not listen to the call of his genius, and partly because she had a vague fancy that by remaining in the land she might find again her child, of whom, however,

they had not discovered a single trace.

Lately Frederick and Stella had come back to England, on account of old Mr. Oakleigh's failing health. That gentleman was travelling out of the world by a slow, round-about road, and was making long speeches as he went, and adding daily some fresh ornament to the grand mausoleum he had built for himself; but still there seemed all likelihood of his soon leaving this life. He wrote to his dear nephew and niece, begging the one to come and be the support of his feeble steps, and the other the golden sunshine of his last days; and though in the same letter he described the blue damask linings of his new landau in a way that did not seem quite the style of a man who was giving up this world's vanities, they could but comply with his wish. Besides, Stella had

not been strong since that long illness, and Oakleigh thought the cooler climate of England might do her good.

Soon after Armine, who was now fifteen, had gone to his new master the sculptor; Monica too left home to stay a few days at Mr. Sparshaw's, with Stella and her husband, who were now there. What a joyous meeting that was! There was Mr. Sparshaw, his good old face, as hale and bright as ever, beaming over his bottle of ruby port and his polished mahogany, for he would never allow in his house a dinner *à la Russe*, which he called a slovenly foreign custom, but always had the cloth removed and the table kept like a mirror.

There was Miss De Vellembie, who was also of the party, purring over Stella and Monica, those two perfect specimens of a matron and maiden reared at Golden Mount,

like a benign old tabby. There was Monica, coming modestly, and yet not without gentle pride, to the sense that she was not living in vain. There were Frederick and Stella, come home in safety from their long wanderings.

Yet in the midst of all their mirth there was a shadow which flitted in and out among the old man's smiles, fell with a softening touch on the severer lines round Miss De Vellembie's mouth, rested now and then on Monica's brow, and touched in silent moments with thoughtful sadness the bright intelligence of Oakleigh's face, but lingered most, sweet Stella, in your eyes. It was the shadow of the lost child.

"And do you really mean, then, Monica, never to marry?" asked Stella, as they sat in the drawing-room by the twinkling fire-light, after dinner, before the gentlemen

joined them, while Miss De Vellembie dozed in her arm-chair, with a basket of plain work on one side and a volume of Hooker's Sermons on the other.

"I hope I shall not; but, you know, people may be seized with a disease late on in life," answered Monica, smiling.

Silent Monica's tongue could move briskly enough when she was alone with one or two friends whom she loved and knew intimately, and with whom she could exchange thoughts familiarly.

"But surely, Monica (you won't mind telling me, I know, and Miss De Vellembie is fast asleep, dreaming about Tiberius Gracchus, or some of those respectable old fellows she's so fond of)—surely you must have had a lover?" said Stella, coaxingly. "Yes, I see you have had one; and not only have had, but have."

She went on as she bent forward to look into her friend's face, where the flickering blaze revealed a tell-tale blush :

"Oh! Monica, if you have a good man's true love, do not throw it away for a foolish fancy."

"It is no fancy, but my fixed opinion, that no woman with a profession ought to marry," she replied earnestly. "It would be impossible for her to do her duty thoroughly at once by her art and her husband."

"Then give up being a woman with a profession," cried Oakleigh's zealous little wife ; "believe me, there is nothing nobler or happier than for a woman to go through the world at a good man's side as his helper and comforter—nothing sweeter for her"—and now her voice trembled a little—"than the first moment her baby lies in her arms."

"This might be so, if every woman could meet exactly the right man, at exactly the right time."

"But surely nothing is easier than that. Why, Frederick and I had not been together ten minutes before we felt that we suited each other like tea-cup and saucer."

"But what is to be the fate of the poor cups which stand patiently on the shelf year after year without their own particular saucer happening to come that way?" said Monica, laughing merrily.

"Why, I should think they had better end by taking an odd one. I'm sure anything would be better than being an old maid, and shutting the windows in June, or feeding fifteen cats on partridge and bread-sauce, or telling about your neighbours stories longer than a dowager's train."

“I mean, as an old maid, to do something yet more eccentric than any of these things. I mean to shut myself up in a garret with a pet ink-bottle,” said Monica, demurely. “But seriously speaking,” she went on, “I know nothing more ridiculous and strange and unjust than the prejudice which most people have against the single life for women. To me it seems a very high and proud thing for a woman to walk through this world alone, keeping her name nobler and purer than any name a man could give her ; living for some great Christian work ; or, if she be an artist, for God and her art ; helping in his road through life, by gentle looks or heart-stirring words, every man who comes near her, until she is to many a one almost as a Madonna, who is sought and looked up to in hours of difficulty or distress.”

“But it must be such a cold life; without love and warmth and colour.”

“Far from that. The single woman makes friends at every step she takes by deeds of love and mercy. The wife’s heart, though full of rich and beautiful things, is a narrow space; but hers is so wide that everyone can creep into it and find rest there.”

“Well, it may be a good way of thinking, and, indeed, no doubt it is so, as you say it is, dear Monica; but I can’t really understand it,” said Stella, shaking her head. “And still less can I understand about your novel-writing—how you can live at the same time with all the people in your book, and with those in the world around you. I am quite sure that if I tried to do it I should lose my own identity, and not know who I really was.”

"I do sometimes feel as if I were rather like Cinderella—one minute dancing with a prince among jewels and garlands, and the next brought suddenly home to a life of very common-place realities. Often when I am in a most heart-rending situation with my hero and heroine, Aunt Pen-lewin will come bustling in for me to add up her week's accounts, because looking at the figures makes her eyes ache."

"After all, Monica, it is no doubt best that you should write, because your thoughts are so good and sweet it would be a pity for the whole world not to know them," said Stella, twining her arm around her friend's waist, and nestling her head against her shoulder while she looked up into her face as she had been looking up at Monica ever since she was a child. "But, darling, I don't like to think that

your authorship should make you have to live always alone."

"I know the great parliament of matrons will never for a moment allow how much best off we single women are. Why, we can flirt when we like, sulk and smile when we like, wear what colours we like, and have what we like for dinner."

There was a short pause after that, for the minds of both friends had drifted away from their playful talk to a sadder theme.

"Stella," said Monica, at length, softly laying her hand on the other's cheek. "Stella, we have not talked at all yet about yourself. Dearest, in that sad past time of which I hardly like to speak to you, you cannot know how much my heart was with you."

"I was sure of that. But we won't speak of it now, it would make me cry so,

and that would sadden our first evening in this dear old house. And yet, Monica, though I have suffered so much, I would not for worlds lose one fragment of the past from my memory, not one look of my child's sweet eyes, not one word which in those hours of misery showed me more fully the depths of my husband's love."

They were silent then for a while, till Miss De Vellembie woke up with a start, and thinking she was in the midst of school-hours, cried out, "Young ladies, attention!"

CHAPTER III.

THE MIDNIGHT VISIT.

IT was a wild stormy night in December. The wind was making itself both heard and felt in and around Oakleigh Hall. It rattled among the bare branches of the trees. It caught up the withered leaves and whirled them pitilessly about. It shook the stable-doors till the horses, dozing as they stood, started and pricked their ears. It led the weather-cock on the coach-house a weary life, making it creak and groan, as though in pain. It crept in through the chinks of the large window in

the armoury, and rioted among helmet and breastplate, so that they clashed together as if the ghost of some old warrior were busy there. It glided through the key-holes of empty rooms, and took liberties with the bed-curtains. It rushed up and down the chimneys howling and whistling. It flung large raindrops against the casements of the garrets where the servants slept, making them wake up and cry,

“The Lord save us ! what an awful night for death to be coming into the house.”

And death was coming thither quickly : for in a room of that old house lay its master, swiftly passing away from this world. By the bedside sat Frederick Oakleigh. Stella had lately been there too, but she was tired, and he had sent her to lie down.

“Who did you say had been here yesterday and to-day to ask after me?” croaked the old man, in a hoarse, low voice.

Frederick repeated over, for the sixth time that evening, a list of names, most of which were well known in the county. Philip Oakleigh was popular among his neighbours. His dinners and wines were good, and he was generally ready to do a civil thing for people of any position, and even, sometimes, for people without it, if he could be sure it would be talked about.

“What a comfort it is to be respected by those of rank and high station!” said the old man. “Frederick, dear boy, labour to gain for yourself their esteem;” and having given this piece of advice, he fell into an uneasy doze.

That vigil of Frederick Oakleigh’s was a dreary one. There was such a hideous

contrast between the blustering wind outside and the fluttering breath within. The old man's shrunk, yellow face, twitching in his restless sleep, looked so unearthly as the subdued light of the shaded lamp fell upon it. The quaint monsters carved on yonder oak press in which tradition said Queen Elizabeth had once hung up her farthingale, came out so distinctly and grimly when the blaze of the fire flashed up, and cast upon them a fitful gleam. The clock on the chimney-piece ticked so loudly, as if it were marking each weak beat of the dying man's heart.

Frederick felt depressed and lonely, and as if he should have liked to have some one to talk to. He could not help fancying that the patter of the raindrops was like the step of his lost child coming to him through the night. The fire, when

he looked into it, was full of faces of people long dead. He thought of the long line of his ancestors, who had lived, and smiled, and wept, and died in that house; and of the old man of whose last scene in this world he was the only witness, and of the little profit the sort of reputation this old man had striven to gain had been to him, and of the less than nothing such a reputation was to him where he now lay. Then he breathed a trembling prayer, both for the departing soul and for himself.

Just then there was a slight noise behind him, and a cold blast of wind streamed suddenly into the room. Mr. Oakleigh's bedroom was on the ground-floor, and Frederick thought that the glass door which opened on to the terrace outside, and to which he sat with his back, had been forced open by the violence of the

storm. He rose, therefore, to shut it; but what was his surprise, on turning round, to see two figures standing in the shadow which fell deeply in that part of the large partially-lit room. Burglars was the first thought which flashed through Frederick's mind; but the idea was instantly dispelled when, on the strangers gliding quickly forward into the lamplight, he saw that one of them was a woman. She raised her veil, and as she stood there—her tall, darkly-draped figure a little bent forward, leaning on her stick—her pale, lined, but still handsome face set in an expression of stern anger—her black eyes glowing fiercely under the thick white eyebrows, and one hand raised threateningly, a believer in the supernatural might well have been excused for supposing her to be an avenging ghost. The naturalist did not exactly think this,

but he was so struck by her appearance, and so utterly unable to imagine who she and her companion could be, or what they could want, that he stood for some moments speechless.

"You may well stand there as if turned to stone, Frederick Oakleigh," she cried, in a voice that vibrated with strong passion. "You know who we are, just as we know who you are; though we have never before met face to face, and even your oily tongue cannot get out a word in the presence of those whom you have wronged for so many years."

"My good woman," answered Oakleigh, who had now partly recovered himself, "your words, as well as your unwarrantable intrusion here, are completely incomprehensible to me, unless you are a mad woman, and in that case, you, who are, I

suppose, her keeper,"—and he turned to the man—"are inexcusable for letting her play such tricks."

"You are more unsound in mind, I think, than this lady, when you call yourself the heir to Oakleigh Hall," sneered the man, with an evil smile.

"Is it an unwarrantable intrusion for a wife to enter her husband's room when he is dying?" asked she insolently.

"A wife—her husband's room," stammered Frederick, his brain feeling for a moment rather in a whirl as he glanced towards the pictures of the two late Mrs. Oakleighs, which hung near the bed, and then back at the woman. But quickly leaping to the conclusion that this was some impudent deceit, he added indignantly, "Whoever you are, nothing but the boldness of shameless wickedness could

make you steal into this house to disturb and insult a dying man."

"With all your blustering talk, young gentleman," said she, laying a mocking stress on the last word, "you know well enough what we are here for. You know that we are come to do for this man what no one else can do—to give him the opportunity before he dies of righting a wrong which has stained darkly half his life."

"And how do you pretend that my uncle has wronged you?" asked Frederick, with a little less assurance in his manner, for just then there started up in his mind a remembrance of having long ago heard a vague story of Philip Oakleigh having in past times a more than usually lasting illicit connexion with an American actress, and the question flashed upon him, could this be the very woman? It was no wonder

that Frederick should only have so indistinct a notion of one of the most marked features in the life of so near a relation. The intimacy between Philip Oakleigh and Eleanor Archdale had ceased before he was born. The whole matter had been hushed up as much as possible, and Mr. Oakleigh, the clergyman, had always (and that more especially after he knew that his brother was going to make Frederick his heir) hidden as far as he could from his son the uglier parts in Philip Oakleigh's character. Frederick could, therefore, well ask Mrs. Brinkworth, in all simplicity,

"How do you pretend that my uncle has wronged you?"

"Was it not a wrong," burst out Norman, "to marry a woman and live with her for many years, bringing up her son as the heir to his estate and name, and then to

cast them both off, and take another wife? But why should I waste my breath in telling you all this, when you and the confounded double-faced priest your father have worked to bring about the very injustice of which we complain?"

This speech, especially the last part of it, roused the old spirit of his race in Frederick Oakleigh.

"I defy you to prove your words!" exclaimed he vehemently. "Whatever my uncle may have been, he was too much of a gentleman basely to betray two women at once. And as for my father—but it would be profaning his memory to speak of it before such as you."

"Spoken like a true Oakleigh," cried a voice from the bed. They all three started and turned round. The old man was awake, and looking at them with keen

intelligent eyes, while his voice was stronger and more natural than it had been for many days. "I have been listening to you, Mrs. Brinkworth, and to your son too, for the last ten minutes," he went on, with a cunning look, which sat grotesquely and horribly on the death-stricken face. "I see what your game is, but you can't check-mate me, even now. Don't be imposed upon, Frederick, dear boy, by her stage airs. You were quite safe in defying them to prove their words. They cannot prove them, for the simple reason that she was never my wife."

"Traitor!" cried Mrs. Brinkworth, in a voice trembling partly from good acting, and partly from real passion, both of which had animated her manner ever since she entered the room. "And will you die with this lie in your mouth?"

"You are nearly as old as I am, and you will very likely soon be lying where I am now ; so you had better ask yourself that question, Eleanor Brinkworth."

"Do you mean then, sir, to say," cried Norman, "that I, your son, am to go on living in the beggarly way I have done to the end of my life, while a mere interloper stands in my place? By heaven, I will not bear it tamely !" and he turned a threatening look on young Oakleigh.

"I am glad to see, Mrs. Brinkworth, your son has inherited your talent for rant," said the old man contemptuously. "But as for your bearing it, friend Norman, the law will see to that."

"Philip Oakleigh, as I listen to you I can but pity you from my heart," cried she, clasping her hands and changing suddenly from a Nemesis into a resigned saint.

"You make me very thankful for the lessons I have learnt in poverty."

"It has been a good school at all events I see for revengeful feelings and bare-faced unscrupulousness. What a comfort it would have been to me, Mrs. Brinkworth," and now he tried to put on one of his old benign looks, but only succeeded in a hideous distortion of his shrunk features, "to find you a little more weaned from violent worldly passions."

It was an awful sight, Frederick Oakleigh felt, this old man and woman, one tottering on the brink of the grave, thus putting on in turn a thin mask of sham religion.

"All your life you have boasted of being thought one of the first gentlemen in the land," said Mrs. Brinkworth tauntingly, for her temper was too much irritated for

her to go on long in her pious *rôle*; "but I don't think you will leave a very gentlemanly memory behind you when what you have done comes to be known."

She had touched one of the few tender points in Philip Oakleigh's character, and she knew it.

"Base woman, I have done for you everything, and more than everything, society can require," he cried, speaking much more quickly and excitedly than he had yet done. "I have settled on you a good income for your life, and in my will I have left your son two thousand pounds." There was a momentary flash of joy in Norman's eyes at this statement, though perhaps he had hoped for more. "When the world hears of it, I shall be praised for my generosity. I shall be honourably remembered among men of rank and position. My

name and estates will descend to a worthy heir. My family"—he raised himself up while his eyes glowed wildly—"my family will live on for centuries in its pride of blood, and birth, and wealth! It will——" But here his words grew indistinct, and he fell back dead.

A great stillness fell upon those three standing round. Frederick sprang forward, and bent over the bed, to see if life was really extinct. Norman recoiled a step or two, as if he did not quite like being so close to death. Mrs. Brinkworth stood gazing for a while into the dead man's face, and as she gazed there came into the black eyes a momentary softness, as though she were thinking of forty years ago; but it was quickly gone, and the old fierce fire was there again.

“Let us go, Norman,” she said. “This is now no place for us.”

She took her son’s arm, and they moved towards the glass door; but when they reached it, she once more turned round and said,

“Frederick Oakleigh, mark my words—you shall hear of us again.” Then they passed out into the darkness.

Frederick’s brain was in a whirl as he stood there for some little time motionless. The painful scene he had just witnessed—the old man clinging to the last to the miserable shreds of his worldly pride; the thought that another laid claim to his inheritance—all these things made wild confusion in his mind. It was in prayer alone that at length the young man found rest and calm.

CHAPTER IV.

FOUR YEARS.

A GAIN we lightly pass over four years. The Brinkworths did not trouble Frederick Oakleigh any more after his uncle's death. The mother and son, who always contrived from time to time to get news of old Mr. Oakleigh, had heard that he was not likely to live long, and had come on speculation to stay a few days in the nearest town to Oakleigh Hall. Money was just then peculiarly scarce with them, and Mrs. Brinkworth (notwithstanding her resolve never to speak to Philip Oakleigh again, unless he made the first advances)

at last yielded to her son's persuasion, and determined with him to try what could be got out of the old man. But how were they to make their way into his presence? That was a doubtful question.

One day, however, when he was prowling round about the Hall, Norman met a man who worked in the gardens, and entered into talk with him, thinking he might learn something useful. In the course of his seemingly careless, but really artful questions, he heard of the glass door which opened from Mr. Oakleigh's room on to the terrace, and which was seldom kept locked. The moment Mrs. Brinkworth was told of this door, her mind, always fond of theatrical effect, at once seized upon the fact as exactly what they wanted, and she laid the plan we have seen her and her son carry out.

That night of the old man's death the Brinkworths drove to a gate which opened from the shrubbery of the Hall into the road, and which Norman had observed in his many walks near the place. There they left their carriage, and as from thence to the house was not more than two or three hundred yards, Mrs. Brinkworth, though but a poor walker, was able, with the help of her stick and her son's arm, to make her entry by the glass door (the exact position of which had been reconnoitred by Norman in the daylight) in full Tragedy Queen dignity. Notwithstanding their loud, angry words to both Frederick and his uncle, the two had known well enough, after old Oakleigh's death, that it was quite useless to say anything further about their claims. Therefore, though they renewed in secret more fiercely than

ever their vows of vengeance against Frederick Oakleigh, they ceased for the present to molest him. On his side, Frederick transacted all the little business with them that his uncle's will made necessary through the old family attorney, and the matter was kept very quiet. Oakleigh's generous nature would have prompted him to add something to Norman's legacy, but his uncle, who had foreseen the likelihood of his doing this, had made in his will a special clause which forbade it.

Frederick told Stella nothing of that strange, terrible scene by his uncle's death-bed, nor did he even make known to her anything about Philip Oakleigh's connection with the Brinkworths. What was the use, he thought, of troubling her fair young mind with so dark a picture? And, besides, he did not wish to make her

think worse of his uncle than she already thought, now that he was gone.

But though the Brinkworths had thus passed away out of his life, the remembrance of his single strange meeting with them, and of the whole scene on that never-to-be-forgotten night, often haunted him. Sometimes when he was out alone in the twilight, he would fancy that those two pair of fierce black eyes of the mother and son were glaring at him out of dark corners in the road. Sometimes he would start from sleep, thinking he heard the old woman's voice uttering her final threat. It seemed to him as if those last words of mad family pride, spoken by the dying old man, had laid on him and his a sort of curse, which could only be taken away by his name becoming distinguished for something better and nobler than an accident of

birth. There were curses too, he knew, breathed against him by that grievously sinned against, though grievously sinning, mother and son, and the thought of these, together with the remembrance of the act of flagrant heartless deceit with which his uncle had stained his life, filled him at times with a morbid fancy that he and his should have one day to atone for the wrong Philip Oakleigh had done. These ideas coloured his whole life after he became master of Oakleigh Hall.

He was soon known in the scientific world by the book he wrote about his South American travels; but in his own county he was still better known as a man whose heart and hand were always ready to open themselves to do a kindly or a gracious act. He mixed in society because he thought it one of the duties of his sta-

tion, but he had grown a much graver man since the weight of wealth and position fell upon him—nay, at times there was a touch almost of melancholy in his look and manner. A vague longing, hardly acknowledged even to himself, for his old wandering life, would also at times wake up within him, producing a kind of indistinct restlessness, which made him not quite so good a country gentleman as he otherwise would have been.

Care of another kind had also come upon him and his wife. Twice in the four years which followed old Mr. Oakleigh's death, Stella had become the mother of a son. For a brief space she and her husband had rejoiced over their newly-found treasures; but the shadow of their lost sister seemed to fall on the cradles of both these little ones. They were as pale buds

which come forth in wintry sunshine, and in a few days they faded away from the earth, to bloom in perfect beauty in a fairer clime.

Sweet Stella's face looked often now as if she were standing in a dim church aisle, with the subdued light falling upon it, but her naturally sunny temper, and her wish to cheer her husband, made her bear up against her sorrows as few women would have done. Frederick, however, did not need her support, as he had done on that day of his first great trouble on the banks of the Amazon, for he was a stronger man than he was then—more firmly built up in patient faith and quiet courage.

Thus the two lived on for four years, mutually helping themselves, but helping others more; sorrowing for the love they had lost, yet thanking God for the love

which was left to them. Their poor neighbours blessed them ; their rich neighbours had, of course, a good deal to say both for and against them. The gentlemen remarked, as they sat over their wine, that young Mr. Oakleigh was not so genial a man as his uncle, forgetting that he of whom they spoke had a heart large enough to shelter every widow and orphan on their estates as well as his own. The ladies in the drawing-room said that Mrs. Oakleigh dressed too like a girl for a woman who had lost three children, little knowing that each ringlet and each bow of ribbon was arranged to gladden her husband's eyes.

From time to time Monica Midhurst, the authoress, who was growing each year in the public favour, came to stay with them, and in the full calm energy of her ripened nature, seemed to bring with her into the

old house a fresh breeze, which blew away all Oakleigh's morbid fancies, and fanned Stella's face, till it looked just as it had looked in the days long ago at Golden Mount, and filled the whole place with cheery, healthy life.

Mr. Sparshaw came once, too, to visit his darling in her new home, where his loud hearty voice, with its broad Devonshire twang, must have been very distressing to the aristocratic ghosts who were said to frequent the passages.

Soon after that visit Stella had the grief of losing her dear old guardian. He was going across Exmoor in the foremost flight after the stag-hounds, when his horse put his foot on a stone which was hidden in the heather, and rolled over with his rider. The horse was not hurt, but his master was taken up dead. A cry of real sorrow went

up from all the country round, for both gentle and simple loved him, and little Stella wept many a tear, and grieved that she should not listen again, in the home of her childhood, to the song of the river. Fortunately, however, the fountain in the garden of Oakleigh Hall had learnt that song already, and was always chanting "Little Stella, little Stella, love him truly, little Stella."

At the end of those four years, after old Mr. Oakleigh's death, there came a change in the lives of Frederick and Stella. A scientific expedition was just going to start for Australia, and one of Oakleigh's old friends, who belonged to it, wrote to him, pressing him also to join it, and telling him that his knowledge as a naturalist would be of the greatest help to the whole party. At first Oakleigh was about to refuse. He hardly

thought it right to leave for so long his large property ; and, besides, what would Stella do ? He could not bear to be parted from her, and he scarcely liked asking her (more especially as she was not so strong as formerly) to follow him upon another distant journey.

Notwithstanding, however, these objections, this call awoke with redoubled vigour within him all his inborn passion for far search into the secrets of nature, and ripened his dim secret longing into strong desire. That desire Stella found out quickly enough, and she resolved he should go.

She was not one of those women who like to keep their husbands all day at home lying at their feet. She thought active work good for a man, and she was proud to see her husband gaining distinction. Be-

sides, she had for some time, without being able to guess the cause of it, noticed the shade of sadness which sometimes hung over Oakleigh, and she believed that this journey would be good for the health of both his mind and body. With the imperious power that a wife sometimes takes into her hands, she thrust aside all doubts and overcame all scruples. A trustworthy agent should be left in charge of the estate. She would go with Frederick. The sea voyage would do her good, and so would the fine climate of Australia.

There was no one now to leave behind who cared much for them, except Monica and Miss De Vellembie; and though she loved them dearly, they had of course no claim upon her like near relations. Besides, both were well and happy, and likely to live till they came back. The end of the mat-

ter was, that the woman's love, as usual, prevailed, and they went.

The Brinkworths, who kept a sort of distant watch on Frederick and his wife, as they had done on Philip Oakleigh, soon heard of this journey. The mother and son were just then in what was even for them peculiarly bad circumstances. Norman had squandered by this time all his father's legacy, and was deeply in debt as well, in most of the large continental towns. They had therefore lately come to London, that wide haven of refuge for evil-doers.

"And is this Frederick Oakleigh to enjoy all his life my rightful inheritance, without my getting even one little bit of vengeance in return for it?" said Brinkworth, as he stood killing weak flies at the window of a shabbily-furnished little room,

and looking out into a back street at a child teasing a kitten across the way, an old woman selling unripe plums just below, and a cab passing by, the horse of which looked as if he had given up even dreaming of green fields.

“The way to our promised land of revenge is hard, in truth, to find, but it will be all the more fruitful when we reach it,” answered his mother, sewing slowly and carefully, as though with each stitch she counted a step of herself and her son on the road to their land of Beulah. It was fifty years ago now since Philip Oakleigh first wooed and won her, yet her eye was as bright, her figure as stately, and her hands were as busy as ever.

“If we don’t get there soon, there is a considerable chance, I think, of my dying by the way, as the pilgrims used sometimes

to do on their way to the Holy Land," he rejoined, with an impatient sneer, turning to the glass over the chimney-piece, pulling out as he spoke two or three of the white hairs which flecked his black locks, and holding them up to the light.

These last four years had done bad work in Norman Brinkworth; he had grown more boldly unbelieving both as to God and man, more morosely weary of even the pleasures of this world.

"Norman, you have no faith in your destiny," cried the old woman, vehemently. "My hair has been white for many a year, but yet I am certain that I shall live to help you to bring upon Frederick Oakleigh such suffering, that to escape one minute of it he would willingly give up a year of his present prosperity. Yes, and I do not despair of drawing from him, by fraud

or fear, at least a part of his ill-gotten wealth." And as she spoke, she snapped in two her thread, and flung it on the ground, and set vindictively her foot upon it, as though it were her enemy's heart-strings she had broken, and was crushing.

"Do you know, mother, I am sometimes tempted to think you were so accustomed in your youth to making prophecies on the stage which were only fulfilled in the sham world behind the foot-lights, that you can't for the life of you give up the habit even in your old age."

"Have you so entirely lost your faith in everything, that you have no belief even in your mother?" said she, reproachfully; for, as usual, she could not bear any real taunt from him.

"No, mother, I did not mean that," he answered, with a touch of gentleness in

his voice. "But, you see, it is very difficult for a poor, out-at-elbows devil like myself to believe that one day he is to go in full fleece and fine linen."

"Norman, I have an idea," she said slowly, as though she were thinking it out. "You must follow this man and his wife to Australia. The fence of the law is weaker in that new country than it is in this. Besides, there are sometimes in travelling accidents which may be cleverly seized and used. We must scrape together enough money for your passage, and when you get there, you must live on your wits. I will stay in some cheap French town."

This plan was discussed between the two, and at last fixed upon.

"But where am I to go for counsel, mother, when you are not with me?" asked Norman in conclusion.

“Follow the counsel of your hatred. That is an oracle which can never fail you.”

So, about a fortnight after Mr. and Mrs. Oakleigh landed, Norman Brinkworth stood also on the Australian shore. He had little difficulty in finding the whereabouts of those he sought, for the expedition was much talked of in the colonies, and he followed, at a certain distance, Oakleigh and his party, like a wolf waiting and watching for his prey. His wits, as his mother had foreseen, provided him with a very good living, and found a wide field for exercise among gold-diggers and sheep-farmers.

CHAPTER V.

MONICA.

THERE have been among women not many sweeter or more harmonious female characters than was that of Monica Midhurst at thirty, the age she had now reached. She was now never uncomfortably conceited and never uncomfortably depressed. She no more wearied and worried herself with questions as to what was her real vocation in life, for she knew she had made final choice of her road to usefulness and happiness in this world, did therefore simply and quietly what little she could,

laboured tranquilly but not the less with intense energy to make it more, and calmly took whatever came of her endeavours. She had neither gone up nor gone out like a rocket, but the number yearly grew of those who found her shedding a few rays of steady light upon their path.

She had resolved never to marry, because she thought that a woman with a profession cannot fully do her duty as a wife and mother; but nevertheless she flirted, and laughed, and chatted as freely as any other young woman of her age with the men around her. She dressed well, and was not at all above the pretty female art of pleasing. Though she was devoted to her work, it could not engross the whole of her full, deep nature. She had love and sympathy ready for everyone, and

both rich and poor knew this, and came to her as one who, though she lived in general out of common daily life, was always willing to enter into the thick of it to help her neighbour.

She had had one or two lovers, as well as Charles Wilford, for it is very difficult for a woman to make men believe that she has chosen the single life; besides, to speak the truth, Monica was something of a demure coquette. Those, however, of her wife-hunting friends who had more sense than sentiment, were beginning to understand her, and to delight in having with a clever woman a pleasant intimacy, which had in it something of the piquancy of flirtation without its pitfalls. Of course, there were some among her feminine neighbours who said she wanted to be married, but could not attain her object, who de-

clared that she did everything for effect, and called her detestably conceited ; but there were many good girls, too, who loved her, and brought her all their little confidences, and looked up to her as a kind of mild superior power.

As for Charles Wilford, he was still, in a certain way, in love with her. Of course his feelings were no longer of that "all-for-love-and-the-world-well-lost" sort, which very young people think the only right thing. He was now a stout, middle-aged Rector, and he would not at all have relished walking ten miles to watch outside her window, or to catch a glimpse of her shadow ; but had she been in any real trouble he would have crossed a stormy sea to help her. He enjoyed his salmon and his champagne a great deal more if she was his neighbour at a dinner-party, but

he never dreamt of showing his devotion by fasting if she was not there. He thought her a good and clever woman, but not a creature of ideal perfection. He had by no means abstained from all flirtation since he knew Monica. He had met many prettier girls than she was, who had taken his fancy for a time, and had paid them more or less attention. But somehow, after a while, the image of Monica had always got between him and these ladies. One had not so sweet a voice as Monica, another had not so well-shaped a hand as Monica, and not a girl among them had half the brains of Monica. He was getting, besides, into comfortable bachelor habits, which it hardly seemed worth while to disturb, unless he could find exactly the wife he wanted.

Sharp-sighted old Mrs. Penlewin under-

stood by this time how matters stood with both him and Monica, and tried no longer to bring about what could not be. As for her feelings about Monica, she was really in her heart very content with her, and said to herself sometimes, " Her ideas are very different from anything I ever heard of when I was a girl, but still, it's like all our family to have a way of her own, and to follow it; and after all it is something for a woman to be able to make her own way alone in the world. It would be very bad if women generally were to fancy they could do it, instead of looking after their houses and children; but then Monica has her own way to go."

Armine Marani had now been at home some months, after a two years' absence. He was a very handsome youth of twenty, with a genius for his art which already

made those wonder who saw him in the studio ; with a rich, but restless Southern nature, with a warm, but passionate and impulsive Southern heart. He and Monica were inseparable companions. In the Summer evenings they took long walks together. Sometimes they wandered through the shady, sweet-scented lanes where Armine, with that boyish playfulness which still often suddenly cropped out in him, would gather large handfuls of wild flowers and feathery ferns, and then all at once shower them over Monica, till she looked like a wood-nymph. Sometimes they climbed to the hill-tops, where the breeze came leaping up from the sea to meet them, and Armine's spirits would rise as he drank in the fresh light wind, and he would tell, with lively Southern pantomime some humorous story, or burst forth into

the words of his favourite poets. Sometimes they would come home, in the twilight, across the meadows where the red cattle browsed on the dew-drenched grass, and Armine, as he looked up at the stars, would speak softly of old memories of his mother. He would linger in the morning at Monica's feet, in the shade where she was writing, pretending to read, but really looking at her instead of his book, though poor Charles Wilford, with whom he had made an appointment to go out fishing, had, he knew well enough, been waiting patiently, rod in hand, for the last hour. He would listen, with the most unwearying longsuffrance, while Monica, not weary yet of shedding ink, would read out aloud, over and over again, some doubtful passage, changing weak words and twisting about sentences, till her hearer might have

been excused for saving his head by flight from the hopeless maze of verbs and adjectives in which he was getting involved.

He would entice her from her work when he thought she looked tired, to come and idle an hour with him on the sea-shore, watching the waves and exchanging airy fancies. In short, he had installed himself as her knight—a state of things which Monica seemed to think the most simple and natural possible, to judge from the openly familiar, affectionate way in which she treated him.

Mrs. Penlewin evidently looked upon their close intercourse as a mother might look upon the intercourse of a son and daughter. The ladies of Wynmouth said that it was very ridiculous of Miss Midhurst to go about everywhere with this foreign boy tacked to her skirts, and that

she only did it to make herself peculiar, which was, they affirmed, always a chief object with her; but as for his falling in love with a woman of her age, that was quite out of the question.

But Charles Wilford was not quite so easy in his mind on this point, when he saw constantly at Monica's side this youth with the face and figure of an Antinous, with the dark eyes so full of genius and passion, with the full melodious voice which trembled at every touch of feeling, like harp-strings when the wind sweeps over them. He would look from Armine's eager face as he talked to Monica, to the face of Monica herself, which was certainly very young for her age—it was so free from all lines made by care or violent passion; and good man though he was, it must be confessed he did not feel very

charitably towards his old pupil. Time and different interests, which, as he grew older, had gradually crept in to keep love from being entirely lord of all with him, had made him contented with Monica's friendship, as she had chosen the single life, but he hardly knew how he should feel were he to see her the wife of another; and this young sculptor would have been a dangerous companion for a Saint Theresa.

The thought of a rival will often make young again for a while an old love in a man's breast. Charles Wilford was more sharp-sighted in this matter of the heart than all the dames and damsels of Wymouth put together. Set a lover to catch a lover is generally almost as true as set a thief to catch a thief.

One afternoon Monica was presenting to

Snowball, who enjoyed an honourable old age, combining at once leisure with dignity, in the field behind his mistress's house, her daily offering of bread, and Armine stood by watching her, an employment with which this young gentleman filled up a good deal of his spare time.

"Dear old Snowball," he said. "You first introduced me to Monica."

Snowball munched his bread, laid one ear flat, nodded his head slowly and complacently, and looked very much like an old master of the ceremonies to whom a like compliment had been paid.

"You have been," said Monica, to Armine, "so long a part of our home-life and home-thoughts, that it seems to be like a vague dream when I think of finding you here, and of auntie adopting you."

"When I remember what I owe to you

and auntie, I feel as if I must have been the most ungrateful fellow in the world not to have said and thought more about it than I have done in all these years," cried he, with eyes which grew very bright, brighter indeed than they had any business to grow with mere gratitude.

"You would have got on sooner or later in the world, even if you had not dropped down amongst us. I don't believe that your uncle and grandmother were such hobgoblins as your childish fancy painted them, and yet I am glad you are beyond their influence."

"I dare say if I were to meet them now I should judge them very differently from what I did then ; but I don't suppose it is likely I shall ever come across them again."

"As we grow older our thoughts and feelings often change about many things

and people. No doubt this is a good deal caused by changes in our own situation. In twenty years' time, when you have made your own way in life, auntie and I, who are now such substantial realities to you, shall perhaps loom in the far distance of your memory as an indistinct vision of a widow and spinster."

"Oh, Monica! can you talk in this light way of our being separated?" he burst out, with passion suddenly flashing in his eyes and quivering in his voice. "I have loved you, I believe, ever since you first picked me up here, and my best ambition is to spend my life in your service."

She started as he spoke, and her cheeks grew crimson, yet still her voice was calm as she said,

"My dear Armine, this is really quite a new joke."

“You are offended, Monica. Is it an offence to call you my queen, my sun, my strength, my life?” cried he, falling on his knees and grasping her hands, and looking up at her with the fire of his father’s native South in his face.

“You know that I think a woman with a profession never ought to marry,” she answered.

She had often spoken those words before, but she was alarmed at the strange, unwonted pang which shot through her now as she uttered them, and which was so different from the gentle sorrow she had felt on refusing Charles Wilford.

“But, Monica, I should only love you better for your talents. I should think it a pride and a happiness to have a wife who could touch distant strangers with thoughts!” he exclaimed, clinging to his

one ideal with all the simple faith of a boy in his first love.

What were these thrills and glows and flutters which passed through her? What was this melting into one delicious whole of heart and intellect and fancy? What was this new mysterious language which suddenly spoke out within her, but which she, student of life—the professed reader of character, could not understand? What were all these wonders which were worked by the simple fact of a young man, beautiful as an Apollo, kneeling before her, looking at her with eyes that could talk better than any tongue—what were they? She dared not repeat the question, but murmuring, “Oh, Armine! it cannot be!” she disengaged herself from him, and hurried away.

How the rest of that afternoon and

evening passed, Monica could never quite remember. She had an idea that Mrs. Penlewin talked a good deal at tea about making custards, and that Armine made the old lady stare by asking, in a tone of deep interest, when she paused in her inexhaustible theme for a word of sympathy from her hearers: "How much salt did you say should be used, auntie?" while she, Monica, was about to take a whole pat of butter on her own plate, when Mrs. Penlewin noticed what she was doing, and stopped her in just housekeeping horror.

That night, however, when she was alone in her own room, Monica forced herself to look the truth bravely in the face; and then she was obliged to confess that she was fast falling very much in love with Armine Marani. At first she was inclined to laugh at this fact. It seemed

so ridiculous to be in love with a boy whose hair she had often pulled—and so like the old story of Angelica and Medoro ; but very soon she was crying heartily enough over the matter.

Yes, she loved him, and how much better might she not love him ? That last question opened a vast treasure cave in her heart, into which she dared glance but for a moment, then she shut it up again close for ever ; for this marriage must, she felt, never be. She was too old for him. In a few years she would be a middle-aged woman, while he was still a young man. Then, very likely he would grow weary of her, and break her heart, and run himself into evil ways. She had been so long accustomed to entire freedom, and public thought—that strange instinct towards wide utterance—had become so necessary to her,

that she felt it would be a very doubtful experiment to try to school herself for the ties of quiet domestic life. Armine was himself an artist, and his wife must have no thought about her own distinction, but must give her life to making for him a home of rest and tranquil joys. She could, of course, give up her own art for him; but how could she, who was as much a born artist as himself, bear to do that? Besides, she had grown to believe that she had a talent to account for, a duty in her devotion to her work. Of course she was not conceited and Quixotic enough to think that God's world would not be as God willed it without her, but such as her work was, it was hers to do, and it was sweet to devote her life to working for the beautiful and true! Yes, for both their sakes it was better that it should not

be. As for Armine, absence and work would soon make him forget this his first boyish love, and in a few years he would find a better wife. Thus she resolved that it could not and must not be.

It was a hard struggle for her, brave woman though she was, and she spent that night in tears, and prayers for him and herself. But when the morning glimmered in the East she was sleeping, and dreaming that she and Stella were young girls again, and gathering dew-sprinkled lilies for their hair.

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE SEA.

STELLA'S health did not stand her Australian journey as well as it had stood her wanderings in South America. The shock of her child's loss, and the sorrows of after years, had weakened her constitution. Her nerves could not bear, as they did when she first married, the many little dangers of this sort of travelling, nor could her body the hardships.

After they had been a year in Australia, she grew so ill that her husband was obliged to bring her back to Melbourne for

medical advice. The doctors there declared rest and quiet to be the most needful things for her; and as the Australian climate did not seem to agree with her, they insisted on her immediate return to Europe. This placed Oakleigh in a most uncomfortable strait. He was the acknowledged head of the expedition, in which he was beginning to take a most absorbing interest, and he had promised his friends to stand by them in weal or woe, and not to leave them till they all thought their scientific duty fully done. This promise, which was of course given when they first set out, and when he believed that his wife would be as good a traveller as she had been in past times, bound him, in honour, to stay in Australia; but how could he bear to let Stella go back alone? Stella, who guessed exactly what was passing in

his mind, at first refused to go, and said she should soon get well again where she was. But, on being further pressed, she declared she would only yield if her husband would promise to comply with one condition. This condition was, that he should not have one thought of coming home to her till the year was past which he and his friends had appointed as the term of their stay in Australia.

He had, she told him, no cause for anxiety about her. She had been a good sailor on the voyage out, and there was little doubt of her being so again. As to her health, the doctors all thought she would be as well as ever when she got back to a European climate and a quiet life. Thus she gave her husband strength, and he was thankful to her for it.

Great as was her grief at leaving him,

she was much too high-spirited a woman to endure for a moment that Oakleigh should, for her sake, cast the slightest shadow upon his honour; and beside, she was even more covetous of success for him than he was for himself. She also knew how much he had at heart the work that he had begun. Yet, notwithstanding her courage, and his longing to look deeper into those secrets of nature of which he had but raised the outer veil in this new wonderful land, the parting between husband and wife could not fail to be a very sad one.

Another circumstance also happened at this time to annoy Stella. Kitty, her maid, who had followed her so faithfully in South America, had served her so well at home at Oakleigh Hall, and came with her on this second long journey, was going to stay in Australia. In South America,

Kitty had lost her heart to Pierre, her French fellow-servant, and Pierre had done much the same with regard to Kitty. But Pierre, whose pockets, like those of many of his nation, had a perpetual hole in them, could not at that time afford to keep a wife. Therefore, when they got back to England, Pierre quitted suddenly Mr. Oakleigh's service, and Kitty was left a damsel all forlorn.

But "all's well that ends well." Who should Kitty meet in almost the first walk she took in the streets of Melbourne but Pierre, who was now a thriving colonial tradesman, and had learnt a charm for keeping gold in his purse. The results of this meeting of course were, first a good deal of pouting on Kitty's part, then a renewal of love-making between the two, and, finally, the appearance of Kitty,

laughing and crying at once, before her mistress, to say she was going to marry and settle in Australia. Mrs. Oakleigh could do nothing but wish the happy pair joy, though in her present state of weak health it was very unpleasant to her to be obliged to have a strange servant as her companion on the voyage.

Many women offered themselves to take Kitty's place, but colonial female servants are not first-class, and it was some little time before Mrs. Oakleigh could suit herself. At length she fixed on a young Frenchwoman, called Madelon, who seemed to have more idea than the rest of the work of a lady's-maid.

Madelon was about thirty. She was a Basque and handsome, except for the settled look of melancholy—nay, almost of discontent—which was always on her face.

She seemed like a woman on whom some early blight had fallen. When she waited on her, her mistress found her manner silent and depressed, but she made up for this by the most ready and attentive service.

As soon as Stella grew a little intimate with Madelon, she tried, struck by her looks, to learn something of her past history; but the Frenchwoman always kept an obstinate silence.

Stella was not well enough, for the present at least, to go to England. The climate of the south of France which was, in fact, her native air, was what the medical men declared best for her; and so the passages of herself and Madelon were taken for Bourdeaux, in a French steamer called the *Reine Hortense*. Did she find the air in that part of France agree with her, she

would lengthen most likely her stay there, and perhaps get some English friend to come to be her companion.

When Madelon heard whither her mistress and she were going, a flash of momentary joy shone upon her face, but it was quickly blotted out by deeper gloom than ever.

The last words of love had been spoken; the last farewells said. Stella sat on the deck watching, through a mist of tears, the quickly vanishing land. At just about the same time that Stella wept the parting from her husband, Monica was weeping over that silent tomb in her heart where lay her first and only love. Thus, though far asunder, the friends were united in the great sisterhood of sorrow.

Slowly, lazily, the days crept past with Stella on her voyage. Sometimes she would lie in her berth for hours dreaming between

sleeping and waking, lulled by the lapping against the keel of the waves which soon learnt the dear old song and chanted, "Little Stella, little Stella, love him truly, little Stella;" sometimes when she felt stronger she would establish herself on deck, and spend her time in a sort of patchwork, now reading a few pages of a novel, now knitting a dozen stitches, now wondering what Frederick was doing, now watching the graceful play of the sea birds; sometimes she would amuse herself with looking at her companions, and admire the nice art with which the buxom widow drew the net each day a little closer around the successful but now doomed gold-digger, or smile at the girlish airs of the perennial young lady who, undaunted by a fruitless campaign in the colonies, was going to take the field again at home, or count the glories in

paste studs and green satin tie of the newly-made gentleman.

But wherever Stella might look, there was one man who, though she did not know it, was often looking at her, and that was Norman Brinkworth. Norman had followed Mr. and Mrs. Oakleigh back to Melbourne, and when he found out that Stella was going to return to Europe, a voice like the voice of his mother seemed to whisper in his ear, "Go in the same ship that carries her. She is a defenceless woman. If you can harm her, you will wound him to the heart."

Notwithstanding the evil of his nature, Norman Brinkworth was still a man, and all that was manly in him revolted at those words, "she is a defenceless woman;" but the voice went on repeating over and over so incessantly, "If you can harm her

you will wound him to the heart, if you can harm her you will wound him to the heart," that at length he yielded, and took his passage in the *Reine Hortense*.

When he had resolved upon this, he wrote to his mother, telling her what he was about to do, and his reasons for it, and asking her to meet him at Bordeaux when he should land, which she could easily do, as she was living in cheap retirement at Limoges.

Brinkworth went among the steerage passengers, because he did not wish Stella to notice him; yet, notwithstanding this, he often managed to get a sight of her. Those black eyes which had blighted the boyhood of Armine Marani, which had haunted Frederick Oakleigh's dreams, had now begun to cast their baneful spell on poor little Stella. He watched Madelon

even more than her mistress. There is a devil sleeping in that face, he thought. Might it not be awakened?—might it not be taught to serve me?

At first the *Reine Hortense* had a very calm voyage, but when she crossed the line the weather grew more stormy. A wild wind came rushing from the north-west, rousing up the waves and playing boisterous gambols with them, and breathing such a mad spirit into the *Reine Hortense*, that she swung and bounded about as if she had serious thoughts of striking work, and taking to the bad habits of the *Flying Dutchman*. The sea flushed into a deep, angry green. The foam threw over the deck vast white sheets. The howling air was full of tales of vessels dashed on cruel rocks, and drowning seamen gasping out the name of home.

This rough weather told very unfavourably on Stella. She was, in general, as she had said to her husband, a good sailor, but her weak health had somewhat changed her in this respect. Though there was no real danger, she grew very nervous and low-spirited, and she soon began also to suffer violently from sea-sickness, which in her weak state caused great prostration.

Madelon was unwearied in her care of, and attendance on, her mistress. She was always at Mrs. Oakleigh's side, silent as ever, but foreseeing, with southern quickness, her every want before she expressed it. Her only fault as a nurse was, that she was so unsympathetic. She seemed to do everything like a good clock, which goes on striking and ticking without caring whether it counts for those in the house hours of joy or hours of sorrow.

At length her mistress became so seriously ill that Madelon called in the ship's doctor. He was a pompous little Frenchman of more skill in his tongue than in his profession. Out of this illness he made a very good thing for himself, and a very bad thing for the patient. The doctor went on declaring, in long, fine-sounding words, that Stella was better, while in reality she was getting worse ; until, at length, a few hours before they sighted Bordeaux, she sank into a state of complete unconsciousness.

Norman Brinkworth felt that his opportunity was now come, and he resolved to seize it. Since Stella had been ill, he had often met and spoken to Madelon in the steward's room, whither she constantly went to fetch things for the invalid, and where he himself, on one excuse or another, frequently contrived to be. The frank, genial

manner which Brinkworth thought fit to assume throughout the whole of this voyage made him a great favourite with all the inferior officers of the ship, and the steward was always pleased to see him in his domain.

“And how is your mistress to-day, my good girl?” he would say to Madelon, in the tone of a kindly middle-aged gentleman; and when Madelon had answered, in her apathetic manner, he would smile, or look sad, as the case might require, and then turn away, as if he had taken the merest passing interest in the matter.

Brinkworth was not only a knave, but he was a clever knave, and his retentive memory had kept a good deal of the medical knowledge that he had gained when, as a young man, he practised for a short time as a doctor. He soon gathered,

therefore, from Madelon's reports, that the ship's doctor was bungling Mrs. Oakleigh's case, and that the results were likely not to be very happy for the patient.

"Well, what account this morning of the dear sick lady?—better, I hope?" said he to Madelon on the day on which the *Reine Hortense* was drawing near Bordeaux.

"She is lying quite insensible, Monsieur."

"Insensible! Dear me! how very sad! Can nothing be done for her?"

"I wish there were another doctor in the ship I could call in to see her," said Madelon, who was a little startled out of her usual impassiveness by her mistress's state.

"Some years ago I myself practised as a doctor," said Norman. "I have retired long from the profession, so that, of course,

I am wanting in many of the newest medical lights ; but if I can be of any use, and if it will be a comfort to you, my poor girl, I shall be very happy to see your lady," and he smiled a sweet humble smile, like a modest saint offering to work a miracle.

His proposal was, of course, eagerly accepted by Madelon, and the two went together to the cabin where Stella lay, pale and still as a crushed lily. Norman put on a look of becoming pity as he gazed at her, though there was a wicked joy in his heart at the thought of what Frederick Oakleigh would feel, could he see how his wife was lying, and who was beside her. He did nothing in reality for her—perhaps no one could have done anything—but he talked as if he quite understood the case, and throughout that day, during which Stella lay without voice or movement, only

showing by faint breathing that she lived, he watched at intervals near her.

The ship's doctor, whom he had, of course, to encounter, soon thought him the most delightful fellow in the world. The whole day Norman played second fiddle to the grand air with variations in which the man of medicine sounded forth his own praises; in short, Brinkworth stuffed the worthy man with flattery, until his usually empty head was as full of his own importance as a fat goose is of beans.

"I can't think where I had best take her when we land," said Madelon, who, what with looking at her mistress's pale face, and what with Brinkworth's insinuating ways, was beginning to show a little womanly softness and flutter.

"If you would like to accept it for her, and if you don't think the dear lady, should

she come back to life, would consider it an unwarrantable liberty on the part of a stranger, I can, I know, offer her a comfortable resting-place," answered Norman.

"Oh, thank you so much, Mousieur," cried Madelon.

"My mother, a most venerable and kind-hearted old lady," went on Norman, "will be on the quay to welcome me most likely when I land. She will, I am certain, readily receive your mistress in her lodgings, and will do all she can for her."

"That is an excellent plan," here chimed in the ship's doctor. "I shall have such crowds of friends around me when I land that I fear I shall not be able to come and watch the case myself, but I know you will follow faithfully all my instructions, Mr. Linwood."

Linwood was the name Norman Brink-

worth had chosen to take on this voyage, because he feared that if Stella chanced to hear his own, she might have learned things from her husband that might make her suspicious at the sound of it.

"I can never forget what I have learnt to-day, Monsieur," answered Norman, with a low bow.

The domes and spires of Bordeaux were glinting in the light of the setting sun as the *Reine Hortense* anchored in the Garonne. There was the usual crowd on the quay when the steamer drew up beside it. There were the people who came for love, the people who came for business, and the people who came for idleness. Among them all the tall figure of Eleanor Brinkworth, as she stood leaning on her stick, was conspicuous.

"Whom have we here?" asked she of her

son, as he stepped on shore closely followed by Madelon and the men who bore the still unconscious Stella.

“It is his wife,” he answered, speaking softly in her ear. “We have her now entirely in our power. What we shall do with her, time and the devil must show.”

CHAPTER VII.

THE NET IS WEAVING.

ONE night, a little while after poor Stella was landed at Bordeaux, Eleanor Brinkworth was kneeling in her lodgings, with a book of devotions in her hand. Her figure, with the grey draperies flowing around it, looked grim and almost ghost-like in the pale yellow light made by the night lamp at her elbow and the stars in the sky above and flaring gas in the street below, which shone in together at the uncurtained window.

“O Lord, set a seal upon my lips, so

VOL. II.

I

that no word of malice or hatred, no longing for worldly things, may pass over them," she read in that full rich voice which long ago on the stage had brought down storms of applause and showers of bouquets from box and gallery, and which the heavy touch of time had not cracked or weakened.

"But hark!" she cried, suddenly breaking off and starting to her feet. "Was not that a noise in the next room?" and she glanced hurriedly towards one of the doors, of which there were two, opposite each other. "He is moving. Surely something decisive will soon happen. Will it be life or death? If it is death, Frederick Oakleigh's heart will be wrung for a while with anguish. But men's hearts soon heal again, however deep may be the wound, and he will most likely take another wife, and have many children, and be happier and more

prosperous than he was before. If it is life, on the other hand, we may with skilful management so twist and shape things that much profit shall come to ourselves, and much slow bitter suffering to him ; but let me go on with my prayers—I was not more than a quarter through them,” and she knelt again.

“Father,” she went on, “it is written in Thy Word that mercy is with Thee. Put, I beseech Thee, into my heart mercy and loving-kindness towards my fellow-men, so that I may forgive as I hope to be forgiven.” Here again she stopped, and, after moving about for some moments restlessly, rose and began to walk up and down.

“Much bitter suffering to him,” she said —“that is what we want. Scripture says the sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children unto the third and fourth

generation; and he has chosen to thrust himself into his uncle's favour, until he has made him his son. This is a righteous vengeance. Philip Oakleigh wronged me as not even the meekest worm could endure to be wronged, without turning against the foot which trod upon it. As his spirit passed away, he prophesied the future greatness of his race. Heaven must have put those words upon his lips in mockery! Of the three children which have been born to this usurper whom he put in my son's place, one vanished like a bud which is stolen in the night from a carefully-fenced-round garden, and two withered in their cradles. Once Philip Oakleigh swore that he was my lover, and once he swore that he was my husband. Traitor! there has been a little coffin in your ancestral halls for each perjured oath

you gave. But I must finish my appointed prayers. I think my tongue must move through them more slowly than usual to-night, or the print must have grown smaller, so that more words are crowded into one page." And a third time she was on her knees.

"Cleanse, I pray Thee, my heart to-night from every thought of guile or fraud; put away from me all dreams of evil, so that I may sleep the sleep of innocence."

"I cannot stay in this position much longer—it wearies me," she cried, throwing down the book and once more getting up. "I must find some more comfortable place for kneeling. If only," she went on—"if only we may be able to weave a subtle web around him while he stands unconscious of it, till his feet are entangled in the meshes! To deceive him must be to

do—well, surely it must have been by the vilest arts which ever the mind of man forged that he made Philip Oakleigh forget so entirely his duty to me and my son. I will work and work at such a web till it is large enough to enclose him on every side—work at it so that each minute of my life shall be marked by a fresh stitch—work at it at noon, work at it in the twilight, work at it in the dark.”

Just as she spoke that last word there was a sudden dimness in the room. The woman who did not fear to live in a foul mist of sin, behind a gaudily-painted religious sign-board, trembled with superstitious dread.

“It is a gloomy way we are going,” she murmured. “There will be, perhaps, no return from it. O God, help us!” And that was, for once, a sincere prayer.

Quickly, however, on looking towards the window, she saw that the unexpected darkness was caused by the putting out of the gas in the street; and Eleanor Brinkworth smiled at her own weakness, and was herself again. She resolved once more to finish her so-called devotions, and to go to bed.

There was a little figure of the Virgin on the table where she had been kneeling. It was no work of highly-finished art, yet there was a touching, patient sweetness in the face, which was so out of tune with Eleanor Brinkworth's state of mind that somehow the sight of it irritated her, and made her, she fancied, more restless. She took up the figure and threw it on the ground, breaking it into fragments. Then she took up again her prayer-book.

It is impossible to say how long she

would have carried on this hideous playing at piety, had not the door she had before glanced at opened, and Norman glided hastily but quietly into the room. He held a candle in his hand, and as the light fell on his face, his mother could see that every feature was stirred by some unwonted feeling.

“Hush!” he whispered, laying his finger on his lips, to stop the eager words which were rising to hers—“a wonder has happened, such as in all our calculations of possibilities we never thought of. But no one must hear an echo of it except ourselves—not even the moth fluttering round the candle, lest he should carry the news engraved on his wings. Above all, she must not be disturbed, not catch a syllable of what we say.”

“A wonder!” repeated she, in great sur-

prise, yet dropping her voice almost instinctively to the subdued key of his. "Surely it must be a very plain case—either life or death."

"Mother," he went on, not seeming to heed her words, and speaking with an excitement very unusual in his cold cynical nature—"mother, I never believed before that there were spiritual beings. I thought that this material world was all in all. But now I am certain that there must be unseen powers around us, for surely some demon who delights in vengeance must have brought about this to help us."

"Norman, speak more plainly—I hate dark sayings!" cried she, with that impatience which so often flashed out of the still twilight shade in which she chose to lie obscured.

Brinkworth drew softly the bolt of the

door opposite to the one by which he had entered, and put out his candle, muttering as he did so, "If Madelon, when she comes back, were to see that there is a bright light here, she might perhaps suspect that we were holding a secret consultation, and might listen at the key-hole." Then he went close to his mother, and the two began to talk in low, eager tones.

For some little time there was an oppressive stillness in the room, a stillness as if the evil spirits of whom Norman had lately spoken were brooding in the air—a stillness broken only by the murmuring voices of mother and son, as they mapped out their wicked designs, or by the plash of a heavy rain-drop from the leads on the window-sill, or by the rattle of a late fiacre through the street, or by the soft crushing sound made by the moth as he struck

against the casement, no doubt desirous, as he had missed the chance of burning himself alive in the candle, to get out of human society as soon as possible; and considering where he was, he was not far wrong.

"Your brain, mother, has worked out the scheme a good deal more quickly than mine would have done," said Brinkworth at length. "No wonder women are said to be at the bottom of all the evil done in the world."

"If women have waded through deep, foul currents to pluck golden apples, it has generally been to give them to men who have been too lazy, but not too virtuous, to steal them for themselves," she answered with some sharpness.

"And so Frederick Oakleigh is, for a while at least, to go on drying his plants and collecting his birds' eggs like an over-

grown school-boy, in blissful unconsciousness of the way we are managing his private affairs for him. Well, he won't be much worse off, after all, than many of his neighbours. More than half the men and women in the world walk through it as somnambulists. The fine lady sleeps in her drawing-room while the humble friends who flatter her are sociably entertaining themselves with her haughty airs ; and the merchant sleeps in his counting-house while his clerk is ciphering gold out of him and putting it on a sure horse for the Derby."

"For all these there comes a day of painful waking, when they curse their sleep ; and he shall curse louder and more bitterly than all the rest put together !" said she, with vindictive emphasis.

"When that day comes I dare say he will care more for the nasty fact that he

has been well taken in than for his wife. Very likely even by this time he may have consoled himself a little for her absence. There are pretty girls in the Antipodes as well as everywhere else, and I lay a pony Philip Oakleigh's nephew and pupil is no St. Anthony," and he sneered one of his ugliest sneers.

"I am deeply thankful at the thought of seeing you, before I die, enjoy at least a trifle of the wealth which rightfully belongs to you," said Mrs. Brinkworth, thinking fit to put on for a minute again the pious mask, and letting her son's last words pass without comment, as she often did many of his speeches that were not exactly suitable for saintly ears.

"Thankful that a man who ought all his life to have had a fine income should be able, for a twelvemonth, just when his

teeth are beginning to drop out and his hair to grow gray, to smoke good cigars and wear a decent hat! Well, doubtless it is good to be thankful for small mercies," he answered, in the frequent tone of moody sarcastic bitterness to which his mother was so used that she scarcely heeded it.

"I hope Frederick Oakleigh won't get a hint that anything is going wrong, and come back before we want him," she said.

"I don't think he will, unless he discover some herb that can make him a conjurer. It would want strong glasses and yet stronger eyes, even close at hand, to look into this mystery, I think,—not to speak of eyes that would have to look through the round blot of globe."

"The turn things are taking shows that our vengeance is the will of Heaven," said the old woman, with much unction.

"It seems to me, mother, that the will of Heaven always agrees exactly with your own in a most miraculous manner," rejoined her son, with a very disrespectful grin.

"My will has always been your good, Norman," she replied, with the touch of real sadness in her voice that was only there sometimes when he was harsh or unkind.

That softened ring in her tones often brought out the only harmonious note in the discord of his nature—namely, his love for her; but to-night he was too intent on the business he had in hand to notice it.

"And now, as soon as she comes in, we must see what we can do with Madelon," he said. "If we cannot bend her to our purpose, we shall be undone."

"I fear we may have some trouble with her," answered the mother thoughtfully.

"She looks like a woman who could, if she chose it, be hard to move."

"If we can only find out what is Madelon's ruling passion, we shall manage her easily enough," said Norman, confidently.

"I observed this woman a good deal on the voyage, and I am certain she has some ruling passion, which is as yet unsatisfied."

"I hope you may be right," replied Mrs. Brinkworth, a little doubtfully.

"Besides," said Norman, with his usual unpleasant philosophy—"besides, in my belief, there is no stone in the world that can't be turned by a golden lever."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NET IS WOVEN.

“I CANNOT do this thing, Sainte Vierge
—I must not do this thing.”

Such were Madelon's first words, when, after her return from late mass, whither she had been, Norman and his mother, after much beating about the bush and a good deal of glossing over of ugly facts, had at length made plain to her what they wanted from her.

“My mother would turn in her grave !
My blessed patroness, the Holy Magdalene,
would tear her golden hair for shame and

anger. And if, after death, I should manage to slip into Paradise with such a stain upon my soul, the saints would lie upon their flowery beds as uneasily as if they were beds of thorns, till I was turned out again."

"You cannot, then, make up your mind to help us in this little matter?" said Mrs. Brinkworth, speaking very quietly, like one who thinks some negotiation entirely at an end. "Well, I respect your scruples, as I always do scruples of that sort. I am only sorry that you should lose a chance of bettering yourself."

"There is no better for me in this world," answered Madelon gloomily. "It is all one dead level."

"Oh! yes, Madelon, there is a better for you and for all of us, if we could reach it," said Mrs. Brinkworth, with friendly cheer-

fulness. "For instance, you are a handsome woman, Madelon; but if you were better dressed, you would be still better looking. There are two betters at once, you see. Would you not be pleased if you had smart fashionable clothes like the maids of the great ladies at the hotels? They would be so becoming to her!—would they not, Norman?"

"Mademoiselle Madelon would look perfectly charming in a blue silk trimmed with white lace," cried Brinkworth, in a rapturous tone, worthy of a silk-mercantile.

"But there is no one in whose eyes Mlle. Madelon wishes to look charming," retorted the Frenchwoman, darting at him a quick, angry glance, as though she suspected he was laughing at her.

"I see, dear Madelon, you have no foolish pride in dress. It is always a good

and valuable point in a woman to be free from all female vanity in such things," said Norman's mother, in the strain of a young ladies' manual. "Doubtless your wishes tend towards some much worthier and more sensible object."

"My only object is to get through life as quietly and as quickly as I can," replied Madelon, with a half-suppressed sigh.

"Of course, of course, all well-constituted minds feel that," said Mrs. Brinkworth benignly; "but we all know that we may live to be old, as you see I have done; and it is a very praiseworthy desire for a young person to wish to provide respectably for old age, should it ever come upon her."

"I hope I may not live to be old," replied Madelon, with a second sigh, deeper and more weary than the first.

"Oh, my dear Madelon, that is not at all a right way of talking; we may live to do much good in the world, and then old age is a beautiful thing. Look at my gray hairs, and see how my son respects them," and she smiled affectionately on that model of all filial virtues, Mr. Norman Brinkworth.

"I have always striven, mother, to be the support and comfort of your age," rejoined the son, drooping his eyelids with a most edifying air.

"You called me here to tempt me to do wrong. I don't mean to do it, and I don't want to stay to hear you two talk about yourselves. So I think I had better go," said Madelon very ungraciously, while she looked from one to the other with a face which told plainly enough that she did not believe in either of them.

“Don’t leave us just yet, pray, dear Madelon,” cried Mrs. Brinkworth, knowing as well as Madelon herself knew it that the Frenchwoman was not taken in, and yet with true female perseverance not despairing of victory in the end. “We are not so bad as we seem to you at first sight. What we want you to do appears, I know, wrong, but we are in reality working in a cause blest by Heaven—a cause of justice against injustice. It is very unfortunate that we cannot forward together your interests and our own.”

“I have no interests to forward,” replied Madelon, very shortly.

“Are you sure you want nothing that we could give you or do for you, in return for your helping us in this business?” persisted the old lady.

“I want nothing but to be as soon as

possible out of your company," answered she, more rudely than before, and moving as she spoke towards the door.

"Suppose," went on Mrs. Brinkworth, seeming to notice neither her last words nor movement—"suppose, in consideration of your obliging us, we were to settle upon you a little annuity, which you would have to fall back upon all your life."

As Eleanor Brinkworth spoke those words there was a sudden change in Madelon's countenance. Her eyes flashed eagerly, the muscles of her face worked, and her lips trembled, as, turning from the door, she repeated the word "annuity." The marble statue had become an animated picture. "But I suppose this is only a vain proposal to cheat me," she added, the hard, immovable face coming back again.

"My mother means what she says, and I

mean it with her," said Norman, glancing triumphantly at Mrs. Brinkworth, as though to say, "You see the golden lever has proved all-powerful at last!"

"But how much would it be?—how much?" reiterated Madelon, her face beginning again to come to life, and her foot tapping the ground impatiently.

Mother and son looked at each other in some doubt; they did not want either to underdo it or overdo it.

"The amount will depend on the amount you do for us," said Norman.

"Will you promise to keep our secret as well as to serve us?" said Mrs. Brinkworth.

"Could it be as much as fifty napoleons?" asked Madelon, speaking in a voice which was hardly audible from strong feeling, and seeming not to have heard the words of either.

"Fifty napoleons !—that is a good deal to ask as an annuity," answered Mrs. Brinkworth, wondering at the sudden change in Madelon, and resolving, woman-like, not to let her drive too easy a bargain.

"I thought it was hopeless, with such churlish souls as you," gasped Madelon ; and the stone face was there once more. "But I should thank God that it is so. It was a terrible temptation," she added, in a low murmur to herself.

"Gently, gently, my dear young woman," said Mrs. Brinkworth blandly. "You jump so quickly at conclusions. What I meant to say was that I thought you might have been speaking at random when you named the sum you did. Think in what luxury one with your quiet tastes might live with an annuity of thirty or even twenty napo-

leons. An omelette, a salad, and a cup of coffee—such are the simple tastes of your nation, tastes which I always so sincerely envy.”

“You have good reason, in truth, madame, to envy simplicity,” replied Madelon ironically. “But let me be gone; I see you are only trying to lead me into evil for your own advantage.” And again her hand was on the door.

Mrs. Brinkworth was forced to press her lips tightly together to keep down her anger at Madelon’s words; while Norman, who thought his mother’s economy ill-timed, cried out,

“Stay, Madelon! You shall have your fifty napoleons, if you will solemnly pledge yourself not only to keep our secret, but to serve us faithfully, till Frederick Oakleigh comes back.”

" Tempter, will you not let my soul escape !" exclaimed Madelon, turning back once more. There was again a change in her face, which was now full of what was almost anguish.

" It is nothing very difficult or disagreeable that we want you to do for us," said Mrs. Brinkworth. " Your time will be nearly all your own. You will be able to enjoy the society of your neighbours, or ramble abroad at your will. Your friends will call you a lucky woman, Madelon."

" How much longer do you mean to go on, madame, gilding rotten wood ?" exclaimed the Frenchwoman, vehemently ; and Eleanor Brinkworth had for a second time enough to do to control her temper. " You," went on Madelon, turning to Norman—" you, though you are quite as bad as she is, do not try quite as much as she

does to wrap up your wickedness in specious tinsel. Tell me, then, at once, and plainly, would my being a married woman be a hindrance to my doing this foul work of yours?—and, for mercy's sake (but I forget, you know no mercy), say that it would !”

“Does the gentleman whom you are about to honour with your land live in Pau ?” asked Norman.

“He does.”

“And is he a man who would be likely to inquire too closely into the manner his wife made her fortune?—or is he a sensible fellow, who takes things easy, and would let his better-half go her own way, as all men do who know what is good and comfortable for themselves, and who even might be trusted to help us at a pinch, if he were wanted ?”

"He is not, I fear, a very good man," faltered Madelon.

"As, then, he is no straight-laced prig, I see no reason, Mademoiselle Madelon, why you should not at the same time perform charmingly your domestic duties, and manage nicely our little business for us," said Norman, with an unpleasant grin.

"Holy saints ! will you make for me no way out of temptation ?" cried Madelon, clasping her hands. "Oh ! you two are devils in human form ! It was, in truth, an evil day for me and my poor mistress when we fell in with you. But tell me, what is it you want me to do ?"

At any other time Norman Brinkworth would have taken a wicked delight in watching how Madelon dallied with temptation, even while she cried out to the saints to save her from it ; but just at this mo-

ment he was too busy with the employment of riveting his chains on to his captive to indulge in his favourite philosophy. He now told Madelon, shortly and plainly, what was the part appointed for her in their plot.

While he spoke, Madelon muttered a few ejaculatory prayers, but still she listened to the end. She knew she was on the brink of grievous sin, and she was both sorry and frightened; but still the hope which the Brinkworths' offer opened to her of reaching that which had been the object of her whole life, and for which she had long pined in vain, could not be resisted. She groaned aloud when Norman had done, but nevertheless she asked—

“And will you secure this annuity to me legally?”

“I will,” he answered, speaking for once

earnestly and simply, for his own interest was at stake.

"But first you must swear solemnly upon the crucifix to perform your part of the agreement," interposed Mrs. Brinkworth, who was already beginning to hate Madelon with a most hearty and sincere woman's hatred.

"Shall I call upon my God as a witness of my sin?" cried Madelon, passionately. "Old woman—if, indeed, you are a woman—surely the evil spirits must have stood around your cradle, each laying in it his own black gift. But I cannot swear upon the blessed crucifix to do your wicked will."

"Then I am afraid your wedding will have to be put off for some time, my dear," said Norman quietly. He was beginning to understand something of the strait Ma-

delon was in, and to feel that he had her in his hands.

"If you don't make up your mind to do what we wish in two minutes the annuity shall drop to thirty," cried Mrs. Brinkworth, with spiteful vehemence.

"Well, then, I will swear—I will!" faltered Madelon, hurriedly. "Only let it not be upon the crucifix."

"It shall be upon this, and upon nothing but this," said the old woman, sternly, taking down a little crucifix which the piety of the landlady of the house hung by the bed.

"I cannot, I dare not!" murmured Madelon, shrinking and shuddering, as the holy symbol was held out towards her.

"Then you will live on a dreary, disappointed woman to the end of your days," retorted Mrs. Brinkworth, who, with

female quickness, had already guessed a good deal of Madelon's story.

"Come, come, my girl, be bold," said Norman, speaking in the character of a kindly friend; and then, in his own character, concluding with, "You surely can't have any respect for this bit of tin, which I could break between my finger and thumb."

Thus at once goaded and encouraged Madelon stretched out a trembling hand and laid it upon the crucifix. She opened her lips to swear, but before she could speak the wind, which had for some time been rising to a gale, burst open the ill-fastened casement, and rushed in a wild gust into the room, putting out the lamp, rustling among the bed-curtains, flinging on the ground Mrs. Brinkworth's prayer-book, and sprinkling the carpet with a shower of

fresh, cold rain-drops, a baptism which in truth it wanted, considering the feet that had lately trodden it.

“The holy saints and martyrs are come to prevent the sacrilege!” exclaimed Madelon. “Blessed Mary, save me! I did not wish to do it. They forced me.”

It was a few minutes before even the Brinkworths could quite recover themselves. When they had, and Norman had rekindled the lamp with a match from his pocket and closed the window, Madelon was found cowering in a corner. There was a storm of tears and sighs and exclamations to be gone through, before they could get her to talk coherently; by degrees, however, Madelon came back to her former state of mind. She saw that what had come into the room was only empty wind, and no army of angry saints fighting for

the right. Her good angel flew away with averted eyes, and her lips spoke the fatal oath.

CHAPTER IX.

MADELON'S REWARD.

MADELON'S story, though it had now run into very dark and crooked paths, had been in the beginning a very common-place and very sad one.

Some years ago, Madelon had been the belle of a country village near Pau, and had had, of course, a great many lovers. Equally, of course, she had chosen the worst of them.

Clovis Marron, Madelon's favoured suitor, was a ne'er-do-well, and his uncle, the wealthy farmer with whom he lived, was a

miser. The uncle (and this was the third "of course" in Madelon's story) forbade, as soon as he found it out, all intercourse between his nephew and the penniless beauty. He wanted, he said, Clovis to bring home with his bride gold pieces whose glitter would last, and not bright eyes that would grow soon dim; yet still, notwithstanding the edicts of old age, young love managed to keep his altar-fire alight.

But what was worst of all was that the uncle, when he felt death drawing near, resolved to keep his hand still on his nephew's shoulder, even after he himself was in his grave. He ordered it in his will that, if Clovis married any woman with less than an annual income of fifty napoleons (a considerable dower in the peasant-farmer's eyes), the money which he inherited from him should pass from his pocket

into that of a more distant relation.

The stroke of paralysis which carried off the old man thus became also the death-stroke to Madelon's sweetest hopes. Though Clovis cared for her as much as it was possible for him to care for any woman, he was by no means inclined to give up for her sake the fortune that he had always considered his own. Without his uncle's money, Clovis would have been a poor man, and would have had, if he had married, to work for his wife and family. This prospect he did not at all relish. He had been idle all his life, and he loved idleness as most men love their trade or profession. He therefore told Madelon (with as much regret, it is true, as it was in his selfish nature to feel about anything) that all must now be over between them. He tried, however, to console her by

assuring her that he should never take the trouble to marry any other woman; and that, if she could ever make money enough to buy the required annuity, she would certainly find him single, and he would make her his wife.

Many women, after such treatment as this, would have turned indignantly away, and have married, out of sheer pique, the first man who offered himself. But Madelon's love was of a tenacious, dog-like sort. From childhood she had always been famous for sticking to her colours in everything. With all his faults, Clovis Marron had been her first love, and she was resolved he should be her last. She heard that money was very plentiful in the colonies, so she went there. Her heart was hardened, her mind and fancy were blunted to all outward things, and her whole nature was concen-

trated in the one great longing to return to France with the appointed sum at her command. But in the colonies Madelon found, like many men and women before and since, that the stones were not all nuggets; and after several years she had worked much and saved only a little.

Throughout this period Madelon had received occasionally from a friend in France letters which told her that Clovis was still single. This fact only served to fan the flame of her unlucky love, for she attributed it to Marron's steady faith to herself. In reality, however, Clovis did not remain a bachelor so much for her sake as because he personally liked a single state the best. He was living in Pau, a useless, pleasure-seeking, sensuous life, and was sinking every year nearer to an animal.

After some time Madelon began to grow

tired of the colonies, and to wish restlessly to leave them. Then it was that she heard of Mrs. Oakleigh's situation. Madelon re-crossed the sea, with her love for Clovis, and her longing to make money, as strong as ever within her. All her better feelings had long been rusting in a stagnant marsh of gloomy apathetic discontent. Little wonder, then, that when the Brinkworths tempted her, she fell.

Pau was wrapped in a curtain of fine, drizzling rain on the night when Madelon entered it to find her lover, whose address she had learnt in her friend's last letter. She thought the town was somehow very different from what it used to be when she had come there as a girl to buy bon-bons and ribbons. The gas shone dimly, as if it had given up in despair all contest with the darkness. The artificial flowers in the

shop-windows hung down their heads as though they were crying, because their daintily-smoothed petals and nicely-rounded cups could after all send forth no sweet breath, like their rivals in garden and hedge-row. The horses in the carriages taking out the gaily-dressed ladies to ball or concert trotted along sulkily, and seemed to be foreseeing long, dreary vigils outside assembly-room doors. The footsteps of the people, as they went and came in the streets, sounded heavily, as if they were all shod with lead. Madelon set all this down to the chill gloom of the night, though the chill gloom of new sin within her had probably more to do with it. But when she reached the house where Clovis lodged, the old love flashed up and made her heart and cheeks warm.

"Is Monsieur Marron at home?" asked

she eagerly of the woman who opened the door.

"No, Mademoiselle—he is not," was the answer.

"Not at home!—oh! how provoking!" cried she, with a little impatient stamp of the foot, which was quite like the Madelon of old days, when a favourite partner was late for a dance.

"Is Mademoiselle come by appointment?" asked the woman, trying, half curiously, half pertly, to peer up under Madelon's hat.

"No," answered she with a faint sigh, as she thought of trysts long ago, beneath moon-lit skies. "But no doubt he will soon be in," she went on more gaily; "I will sit down and wait for him."

The woman showed her into Marron's room, set down a light, and left her. The

minutes dragged slowly by. Ah, me! how different was this waiting for the loved one in that little back-room, smelling of stale tobacco, and lit by one flickering candle, from vigils she could recall beneath the green hedges, with the scent of new-mown hay around her, with myriads of stars above her head.

The carriages rumbled by in ceaseless monotony; the clocks drew out their strokes as though they were trying to make them last till it should be time to strike again. A dog ran out of a neighbouring doorway, making loudly and publicly known to all bad characters in the town that he should be on the watch that night; and having thus eased his mind, went back to his mat. The tones of the organ in the church across the street, where late mass was going on, came rolling in through

the window. A few short hours ago, she had knelt at such a service ; but now she shuddered at the sacred sounds, and closed the casement that she might not hear them. Still the minutes dragged slowly by. The face of the angel in the print on the wall seemed to be scowling at her. Marron's watch, which he had left on the table, ticked loudly—petulantly—as if it were angry at her intrusion. A door in the house banged at intervals and made her start. Still the minutes dragged slowly by. There were many footsteps in the passage outside, but none stopped at that door.

At length one did stop ; but what a different step it was, as it shuffled along slowly and heavily, from the step which used to come bounding towards her over the dew-spangled grass. Soon the door had opened, and he stood before her.

But could it be he? Could this broad-shouldered man, with the bloated face and the lack-lustre eyes, be the lithe youth with the sunny smile who once lay at her feet in the Summer twilight, or in the merry Christmas time whirled her round in the waltz. For some moments she stood speechless, staring at him, while the warm blood which had risen to her cheeks flowed back in an icy stream towards her heart.

“*Ma belle*, who are you and what do you want here?” said he, first breaking silence and looking at his visitor in no small surprise.

The tone of his voice was that of the old Clovis. It was the same voice which had often called softly beneath her window. Yes, she knew him by that voice, and cried out,

"Oh, Clovis, I am your Madelon!"

"Madelon," repeated he, with more astonishment than pleasure in his manner.

"Why, how the devil, my girl, do you come to be here? I thought you were at the other side of the world."

"Did you think I could always stay so far from you, Clovis?" she asked, half sadly, half reproachfully.

"The fact is, my dear," he answered, yawning, "I have not thought very much about the matter. Old uncle, as you know, would not let us make a match of it, and so there was an end of the business."

"Clovis, I see you don't love me any more," faltered she, while a sudden chill passed through her frame and made her shiver.

"Oh yes, of course I do," he replied, in the tone of one who says over some formu-

la, without much thinking of his words. Then with more animation he added, as he held the candle up to her face, "You are a handsome woman still, Madelon, and it is some credit to a man to be able to say he could have had you for the asking."

"I am so much altered that at first you did not know me," said she, sighing, yet glowing with pleasure at even this cold compliment.

"That was little wonder, when I no more expected to see you here than I did the ghost of my grandmother. But tell me, Madelon," and he gave a second yawn, louder and longer than the first. "Tell me what do you want with me?"

"I am come to offer you something, and to ask for something in return," answered she gravely.

"I shall be very glad to do anything I

can for you, my girl, except—" and now he hesitated a little. "Except, in short, lend you money. Though my uncle left me a very nice little income, it won't go very far, now that I live in society in the town ; and the cunning old fellow took good care to tie up the capital, so that I can't spend a sou of it."

"You are extravagant, I fear, Clovis," said Madelon, rather severely.

"Now, Madelon, no preaching, you know I never could endure it," he answered roughly. "If a man can't have a good dinner and a bottle of good wine, life is not worth living."

"You used to like a dance better than your dinner, and to say that you only cared about a glass of good wine because it made your voice more mellow for singing," said Madelon, lingering fondly on those pallia-

tives of his faults that she used to try to believe were the first beginnings of these same faults turning into virtues. Poor Madelon ! When did ever rank weeds turn into wholesome herbs ?

“ I suppose I was a boy when I talked in that way,” he said, contemptuously. “ But do tell me, Madelon, what you want of me. A fellow can’t stay up all night, even when his old sweetheart comes back.”

“ If I had the fifty napoleons a year which your uncle appointed as the fortune of your bride, would you marry me, Clovis ?” asked she, in a low tone.

“ I would do anything for money,” he answered, with more truth than galantry.

Madelon turned away her head to hide the tears of humiliation and disappoint-

ment that were in her eyes. Should she go back? There was still time. No, for she loved him, and had sinned for him.

"There are many people in the world with full pockets, who are both sick and sorry," she said, faintly.

"I tell you, girl, gold is the very breath of life, the very blood that circulates through a man's veins!" replied he, vehemently.

"Clovis, I can give you a small quantity of this breath of life, if you will take me with it; for I am now the mistress of fifty napoleons a year."

"You the mistress of fifty napoleons a year, Madelon? Impossible! It is really hardly worth keeping me up for such silly jokes as this."

"It is as true, Clovis, as that I love you still," she said, earnestly.

"But how could you have made so much money?"

"I came home as maid to an English lady. For certain things I have been able to do for her and for her friends, they have settled this annuity upon me."

"Ah! the English, they have always money to throw about. They are a lucky nation. And this is really true, Madelon?"

"Quite true," she affirmed again.

"Well, then, my girl, we will have a jolly wedding at last. But let's wait till to-morrow to talk about it, for there's plenty of time, and to-night I am too sleepy."

And it was for this that she had sold herself to evil. Yes, but she loved him still.

CHAPTER X.

ARMINE MEETS A NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

MONICA had been quite right when she thought that her rejection of Armine Marani would do him no permanent harm. The day after that night when Monica, with such a hard struggle, made up her mind that it would be best for both Armine and herself never to be more than friends to each other, the two had a long talk together. Monica refused at once, very gently, but very decidedly, to be his wife, and made him promise to go and work for a year at his art without see-

ing her again. At the end of that time he would, she hoped (for she knew the butterfly nature of a boy's first love), be able to meet as if she were, what she told him she would always be to him, a dear elder sister.

So Armine went to London, and was of course, or at least believed himself to be, for a certain time, supremely miserable. Once he got up very early in the morning, with the intention of drowning himself in the Serpentine, but changed his mind, and took a 'swim instead. Twice he started with the intention of losing himself among the wild tribes of Central Africa, but ended by merely giving himself indigestion with eating shrimps at Margate. Thrice he resolved to send himself into a consumption by living upon biscuit, but always broke his vow every day at one P.M., by consum-

ing a mutton-chop and a pint of porter. He squeezed out a sonnet every morning while he was in his bath. He let his hair grow to an unbecoming length. He gave up the *deux-temps*, and took to smoking.

Yet, notwithstanding all this, he was working steadily at his art as a sculptor, and at the end of six months he wrote to Monica as calmly as if she had really been his sister. He then begged to be allowed to come home, but Monica would not let him till the appointed year was up, partly because she feared for him, but more perhaps because she feared for herself.

The woman of thirty found her wound harder to heal than the boy of twenty found his. Monica's love for Armine was in some sort still alive. As soon as she knew that it was safe to do so, she had let it rise up again from that tomb in her heart where

she had laid it; but it rose in a passionless, a purified, and chastened form, which had in it all the best of the love of mother, and sister, and friend.

This feeling had in a certain measure softened and raised Monica. It made her more tolerant with others, since she had once been almost ready herself to swerve from her chosen path in life. It made her feel that, however dear her own fame was to her, there was one thing that was dearer, and that was Armine's welfare.

This affection did not, however, make Monica less zealous as a worker. She was the same bold-hearted, single-purposed woman that she had always been since her first conceit was rubbed off her by contact with her fellows, and since she resolved to devote her life to her art.

Though they did not personally meet,

Monica and Armine kept up a constant correspondence ; and it was a good deal owing to those lively, sensible letters of hers, in which the fancies were so ideal, and yet the treatment of right and wrong so practical and straightforward, that he went on in the road towards both God and worldly prosperity. There were times when Armine, like many young men of talent, was inclined to disbelieve in everything, and when he ran headlong into wild dissipation. Thanks, however, to Monica's letters, and to his early training, each fallen stone was carefully put back again into the structure of his religious faith, and each wandering from the upward path always ended in a glad return to it.

Monica had, of course, some difficulty in accounting to Mrs. Penlewin for Armine's long absence, but she persuaded her that

it was caused by devotion to work ; and the old lady, who always liked a man to stick to his business, was well pleased with this explanation. As for Charles Wilford, he wanted none. With a lover's instinct, he guessed what had happened between Monica and Armine, and even something of what was in Monica's heart, and he also was well pleased. At least Monica would not give this boy the place she had refused to him, and his feelings for her relapsed once more into their usual tranquil state.

During this period there was one thing which caused Monica much perplexity and uneasiness, and it was that throughout the year she had had no letter from Stella. The last she had received from her had been written just before she sailed for Europe, and in it she had told her intention of going to the south of France, and

had promised to let Monica hear again as soon as she arrived there ; but no such letter had ever come.

After two or three months, Monica had grown so anxious about her friend, that she had written to the housekeeper at Oakleigh Hall, whom she knew well in her former visits there, to ask for news of Stella. The housekeeper answered that the last time Mrs. Oakleigh's man of business was down at the Hall, which was about a week ago, her master and mistress were both well, and still somewhere in foreign parts, which was the good lady's vague general way of speaking of all lands, from the Isle of Wight to the Antipodes, which had to be reached by crossing the sea. She did not know Mrs. Oakleigh's direction, for she never wrote to her ; both Mr. and Mrs. Oakleigh heard every-

thing about their property from their man of business, who visited it from time to time, and looked after the whole estate.

As this last-named gentleman seemed to be the only person who could give her any further tidings of her friend, Monica wrote a second time to the housekeeper, to ask her to obtain from him Mrs. Oakleigh's address. The housekeeper promised, in doubtful grammar, and yet more doubtful orthography, to do what Miss Midhurst desired ; but her memory, being not quite so long as her cap-strings, the agent went and came two or three times before she remembered to ask him Monica's question. Thus more than half a year had passed since the last letter from Stella came before Monica got her address, which was Villa Grimaldi, Pau.

To this direction Monica wrote three

letters quickly, one after another ; but as she got no answer, and as she knew through the housekeeper and the agent that Mrs. Oakleigh was well, she at length grew angry, and came to the conclusion that Stella must mean to cut her old friend. She found it very hard to believe in this, but facts seemed sternly to force the truth upon her, and so, for the present, at least, she was obliged to acquiesce in it. Miss De Vellembie, to whom Stella's letters had been always forwarded by Monica, was as much astonished as she was, and the two wondered a good deal about the matter, and said they never could have thought their little Stella would have behaved so.

At the end of his year of steady hard work, Armine Marani began to think himself entitled to a holiday. Some of his work had brought in a little money, and

this he resolved to spend in a tour abroad, which he would take before he went to Mrs. Penlewin and Monica in Devonshire. He made known his intention to those two high powers, and, they approving, he set out.

He was a happy fellow when, having steamed to his ground, he left the railway at Farbes, and, with his knapsack on his back, walked towards the Pyrenees. The southern blood that was in him made him rejoice in the brilliant sun, which most English walking tourists grumble at as if their native fogs were among the dearest of their home privileges.

With all the young artist's delight in change, he loved to wander on without any settled plan—to travel without knowing where he should sleep to-night, or whether he should turn his steps to-morrow.

In the morning he would rise before the sun, and watch the distant, pale, phantom-like snowy peak first flush faintly, like a girl who dreams of her lover; next glow a rich purple, like the mantle of a young queen; then burn deep crimson, like a mighty angel clothed in robes of fire. At noontide he would lie in the shade by the stream in some deep green valley, listening to the soft, monotonous chant of the water, watching the insects as they poised themselves lazily on their painted wings, and gazing up into the blue sky above, a dreamer about past, present, and future. In the evening he would turn into some small wayside inn, or even into a farm-house—for his handsome face and genial manners always secured him a ready welcome—and would mix with the peasant men as they sipped their sour wine, or listen to their

quaint legends of the old grandmother of the family, or play with the children as if he had been one of themselves. Sometimes he met a party of ladies riding down from the mountains all eyes and exclamations, or was passed by a carriage full of British tourists, one half of them asleep and the other half eating sandwiches, but in general he kept as much as possible off the beaten track.

One sultry afternoon Armine was lying in the shade of a rock in the lovely valley of Argélés. He was thinking of his old love for Monica, which seemed to him a thing of very long ago, and wondering at the difference between the wild, passionate glow of those past days, and the sweet, quiet, trustful feeling that now filled his heart and mind as he murmured her name. All at once he was roused by a scream

somewhere near him. He rose and went round the rock. There he saw a lady (at least, she seemed such, as she was not in the dress of the peasant women) defending herself with her parasol against the attacks of a mischievous goat, who, having strayed from his herd, was now amusing himself in this very ungentlemanly manner. With his walking-stick Armine soon drove away the offender, who scampered off, to find some other more suitable subject for his pranks.

"Oh, thank you so much! I was so frightened," said a sweet voice at Armine's side.

He turned round and saw a lovely face, still flushed with fear, yet smiling at the speedy deliverance, upraised towards him.

"I am so glad I was near to help you," he answered, in that hearty, boylike way

in which he sometimes still spoke when he was very much in earnest,

"I had been wishing for something to happen," she cried, laughing. "I was beginning to feel quite dull and drowsy. But when something really did happen I began quickly enough, you see, to wish for quiet again. That is the way with many of the things we wish for, I suppose," and her face grew thoughtful.

When she smiled she seemed a playful child; when she was grave she seemed a woman whose eyes had looked into the saddest places of human life. One moment she appeared to be but just standing on the threshold of girlhood, the next she appeared to be moving on quickly towards middle age.

"But I mean, in my journey through the world, to make up well my mind be-

fore I wish for anything—and then resolve to have it,” said Armine, much wondering within himself at the manner in which he was telling his inmost feelings to a mere stranger.

“I like a man to talk in that way,” she answered, with beaming eyes. “I think I fancy I knew some one who talked so. I wish I could remember—but perhaps, after all, it was only a vision.” And again she suddenly looked many years older than she had looked a few seconds before.

But, whether she was child or woman, the sculptor felt that no fairer ideal of female loveliness had ever met his waking gaze or haunted his dreams.

“Your fancies and memories must be all beautiful,” he cried, with eyes which spoke out plainly enough his thoughts about her.

She blushed a little, and turned away her head as though to look at the distant hills; yet still there was no displeasure in her voice as she said,

“I must be going home; it is getting late.”

“Shall I walk part of the way with you, lest you should be frightened again?” said the young man, wishing heroically he might see a bear in the distance, from which to defend her.

“I should have liked very much to have you with me,” she answered, with almost childish frankness, “but there is some one coming to look for me.” And as she spoke a gentleman was seen advancing down a narrow path near at hand.

CHAPTER XI.

ARMINE MEETS AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

THE gentleman had now come close. Armine stared, started, looked away, and then stared again. Surely it could not be; and yet surely the painful sensations which came surging up out of long-past years, and set his heart and head throbbing, could not have been called up by mere fancy. Yes, it was most truly and certainly none other than his uncle, Norman Brinkworth.

That gentleman, on his side, looked at Armine with a very perplexed air. He

was surprised to see a stranger with the lady, and he thought, too, that he knew the young man's face. As, however, he had not seen his nephew since he was a child, and as boys and girls from ten to twenty change much more in appearance than men and women from forty to fifty, it is quite possible that Armine, had he chosen to do so, might have slipped away without being fully recognised by his relation ; but, in his great astonishment, and in the conflicting feelings which this unexpected meeting called up, Armine formed no such intention, and almost before he himself was aware of it, the words, " Oh ! uncle, can it really be you ?" had dropped from him.

It was now Brinkworth's turn to start on finding the notion that this was his nephew, which had just now but flashed through his brain, thus suddenly confirmed. A most

unmistakeable expression of scorn and displeasure, not unmixed with something of uneasiness, curled for a moment Norman Brinkworth's lip, and glittered in his eyes at this discovery. But Armine did not notice it, for just at that instant he was glancing at the lady, whom even in his present disturbance of mind at meeting his uncle he could not forget. She was looking with evident wonder from Norman to Armine, and back again from Armine to Norman, but her face was now much more that of a curious child than of a thoughtful woman.

With that quick control of feature which is only gained by those who live constantly in society, Brinkworth cleared away the cloud that was in his face, and when Armine's eyes were again turned towards him the most genial friendliness was beaming round his mouth and upon his brow. "My

dear Armine, what an unexpected pleasure!" he cried, holding out his hand. "Who would have thought of our stumbling upon you here."

"I could really at first hardly believe it was you, uncle," answered Armine, prepossessed, in spite of memories of the past, by Brinkworth's manner, as all very young people generally are by externals.

"And now you must come home with us, to see your grandmother. How delighted she will be!" said the affectionate uncle. Then observing that Armine held back a little, he went on in his most winning tone, and Norman Brinkworth, in spite of his cold cynical nature, could put on such a tone when it pleased him; he inherited it from his mother, who had once been the most fascinating woman in America. "But I see, dear boy, you cannot quite forget the

past, and it's quite natural that you can't. Our conduct at that time was very wrong, very inexcusable. But the fact was, we were so wretchedly under water, and that made us sour and disagreeable. A most ruinous speculation, dear boy, that west-country farming—a most ruinous speculation. Your grandmother, who was always, you know, a pious woman, has often said that your running away from us when you did was quite providential, for soon after that we had to fly from some creditors who were getting a little troublesome. We have never liked to write to you, because we did not know how the kind old lady who adopted you might take it; old ladies sometimes have queer fancies. We knew, however, that you were in good hands, so we were easy about you. We have frequently talked of you, and wonder-

ed what you were growing up like. Altogether, I feel we have behaved very badly, but you must be a good fellow and let bygones be bygones."

Now Armine was not entirely taken in by this flow of pleasant words. He saw that there was a good deal of superfluous varnish in his uncle's manner, but at the same time he thought he saw that the man, who in the gloomy old Devonshire farmhouse had been such an object of vague dread to his childish imagination, was now (seen with his grown up eyes under a bright southern sun) a good-looking, civil, middle-aged gentleman. He remembered how Monica had once said that very likely if he met his uncle and grandmother again he would, after all, not find them such terrible beings as he had believed them to be in his early boyhood; and it now seemed that Monica was right.

"They are my near relations," he thought, "and surely a little intercourse with them cannot hurt me, even if they are not the most virtuous people in the world. Besides, it seems that she lives with them," and he glanced towards the lady.

That fact, though the young man did not own it to himself, spoke within him more persuasively for Norman Brinkworth than anything else.

"I am glad we met, if it is but to show you that I have forgotten all that was painful in the past," he said heartily. "It is wonderful, as we grow older," added the philosopher of twenty-one, "in what a different and softened light we look at everything!"

"That is exactly the way in which I should have expected to hear you talk,

dear boy. There is no quality so delightful in man or woman as a reasonable readiness to bear and forget the shortcomings of others," said the uncle, in the strain of a moral Lord Chesterfield.

"Have you been long in this valley? Are you staying here?" asked Armine, his eyes once more travelling back to the lady, and his mind wondering at the connection between her and Norman Brinkworth.

Norman noticed the direction of the young man's gaze, and evidently guessed his thoughts.

"We have a little villa here, where we have been living for some time," he said. "We stay here for the health of my niece. By-the-by, Armine, I ought to have introduced you formally to your cousin, I suppose; though as I came up I saw you had already made acquaintance with each other.

Bella, your cousin Armine. Armine, your cousin Bella. Perhaps you guessed you were related when you first met?"

"My cousin!" repeated Armine incredulously, for he remembered that his mother had always told him she had no other brother or sister besides her brother Norman.

As for the young lady, she did not speak; but she looked at Armine with an evident increase of interest in her face.

"I see, you can hardly believe your good fortune in having so charming a relative," said Brinkworth, rather hastily. "Of course she is only your second-cousin. You know your dear mother and myself were your grandmother's only children. She was the daughter of a first-cousin of mine, but she always calls me uncle—it sounds so much more familiar and affectionate."

His explanation satisfied Armine. He could not recall his mother ever having spoken to him of any cousins, but then she might very likely have had such relations without having named them to him, child as he at that time was.

"It is indeed an unexpected pleasure to call you cousin," he said, turning to the young lady.

Again she did not speak, but she smiled and looked kindly upon him, in a sweet, child-like way.

"And now we have established our right of relationship to you, we must carry you off home with us," cried Brinkworth, still in the tone of the genial uncle; and, so saying, he led the way along a capricious little path, which now dipped down to the stream, and now swung itself up on to the green mountain-sides. As they went,

Brinkworth talked easily and pleasantly to Armine about indifferent subjects—about his first falling in with the young lady—about his art as a sculptor—about the Pyrenees, and about the Basque peasantry.

Bella said very little. The greater part of the time she was gathering wild-flowers, to add to a nosegay she held in her hand; or gazing with evident delight at the rich mellow colouring of the distant hills; or running on before them, and then stopping to glance back and smile. Once or twice, however, that strange old look which Armine had before noted, came all at once into her face, her eyes fixed themselves on the ground, her feet moved slowly, and she seemed like one present in body, but absent in soul. When this was the case, Brinkworth generally asked her some abrupt question, which appeared to bring

her back directly to herself; and she was the same merry girl, nay, almost child, as before.

Armine's eyes constantly followed her, and were now and then so rude as to make his tongue stumble in answering his uncle. Brinkworth noticed how the young man's looks hung upon the slight figure and the pretty, changeful face; and, as he watched the two, there suddenly darted into his face a flash of keen, wicked intelligence, as though an evil spirit, which was slumbering somewhere in his heart or brain, had all at once awoke.

"A noble thought!—a rare thought!" he muttered to himself, dropping for a moment a little behind the other two. Then he came forward, and began to talk to Armine about the ascent of the Pic du Midi.

When they came in sight of the house

where the Brinkworths lived, which was a pretty mixture of cottage and villa, the young lady ran merrily on, and was inside the door two or three minutes before her companions.

"A dear child that—a sweet interesting creature," said Brinkworth, looking after her.

"She is very beautiful!" cried Armine, enthusiastically.

"What a true artist's eye you have, dear boy! Yes, she is a pretty girl, and her heart is as charming as her face. Poor thing, her story has been a sad one! She lost both her parents under peculiarly painful circumstances." And for fifteen seconds Mr. Norman Brinkworth put on the face of a chief mute at a funeral. "Don't ever question her about her past, Armine. She had a terrible fever from

the effects of her sorrow, and her memory and mind were for a time quite deranged. She is getting all right now, with care and quiet, but for the present we never mention her former life before her. You must not be surprised if she sometimes talks in a simple, almost childlike way, for her really fine intellect has not yet quite regained its balance, though we have no doubt it eventually will. You will be gentle and careful with her, I am sure, dear boy."

"I fancied something of that sort about her. I am glad you put me on my guard."

Brinkworth was now silent for some moments, and to judge by a slight disturbance in the smiling mask he had chosen to wear ever since he had been in his nephew's company, troubled thoughts were stirring deep down in his mind. Armine, how-

ever, did not notice this. He was too busy trying to fit in what he had just heard about Bella with what he had seen of her. When that old look comes into her face she must be vaguely recalling past sorrows, he thought.

"Since we last saw you a very refreshing little shower has fallen upon us," said the uncle, breaking silence rather abruptly.

"How do you mean?" asked Armine, a little absently.

"A very dear old friend of my mother's has left her his whole fortune, on condition that she and her son should take his name. So now we are Mr. and Mrs. Lynwood. It was difficult at first to learn to write N. L. at the end of my letters, instead of N. B., more especially as these latter are very notable initials," and Norman Brink-

worth (we shall continue to call him so, whatever he may call himself) laughed at his own small wit. "But it was worth getting out of the old habit, as Norman Lynwood can perform little miracles in the way of cheques which were impossible to poor Norman Brinkworth."

By this time they had reached the house.

"I will go up first, and tell your grandmother, who is here," said Norman. "It might shock her if you were to come upon her too suddenly."

So saying, he ran upstairs, while Armine stood at the house-door in a maze of thought. He thought of his unexpected meeting with these relations, who he always believed had entirely passed out of the story of his life. He thought of the pretty face on which the shadow fell. He wondered what Monica would say, did she

know where he now was. His musings were interrupted by his uncle's voice calling him upstairs.

The old lady was sitting at an open window, which commanded a lovely view of the green valley, with its green mountain walls. As Armine drew near her he felt as if he had made a sudden leap back into his childhood. There was the upright figure; there was the large piece of coarse linen hanging down over the grey dress; there were the bony hands stitching away as if they had never ceased to stitch for the last eleven years; there was the crutch leaning against the arm of the chair; there it all was, exactly as it had been in the old farm-house in Devonshire.

"Here is the young man, mother," cried Norman, and as he spoke Armine could not help recalling that Winter morning

long ago when his uncle had brought him into his grandmother's bed-room.

A shudder, as from an icy wind coming straight from those past days, shot through him, in spite of his manhood, and for a few moments he heard the telegraph wire as distinctly as he had heard it on that night when he fled from his uncle's house, repeating in his ear, "Run away, run away!" but an instant after he chid himself as a coward, and laughed at himself as a fool.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DARKNESS DEEPENS.

“ I AM thankful to have lived to see you once again, my dear grandson,” said the old woman, grasping Marani’s arm, and drawing him down towards her till her lips could touch his forehead. “ As you have grown in height, so I trust you have grown in goodness, and will go on growing till you reach the full stature of perfection.”

“ I trust so too,” answered Armine, quietly. He had wit enough to discern that there was a good deal of the whited sepulchre in his grandmother’s piety, as

there had been in his uncle's civility; but as, this time, she had received him with a kiss instead of a rap on the head, and as she also lived under the same roof with the fair Bella, he was disposed charitably to hope that the old lady, in these past years, had made some progress in that path of virtue which she seemed so ready to recommend to himself.

"Your uncle and I were at one time wrong and neglectful in our conduct towards you," went on Mrs. Brinkworth. "We remember and own the fact with sorrow. But the most eminent saints have erred," and she looked down at her own busy hands, and up at her hopeful son, as if she thought there was good prospect of him and herself being enrolled among the latter.

"I have forgotten all that," replied Marani.

"Forgiveness of injuries is a beautiful Christian virtue," cried the old woman, turning up unctuously her eyes, though at that very moment she was thinking how like the young man's smile was to the smile of that daughter who had once dared to disobey her, and was hating him for it.

"Come, come, mother, you must not frighten the poor boy by a sermon the instant he enters our house," here broke in Uncle Norman, in his most genial tones. "Let him first have a little dinner and a bottle of claret, and then, perhaps, he may bear it better; but for the present I beg him off. Armine, dear fellow, of course you will stay and dine with us?"

Yes, Armine did stay, and did eat his dinner and drink his bottle of claret, and did listen to more of the old lady's pious talk, and swallowed cutlets *à la sauce pi-*

quante, and St. Julien, which called itself Château Margeaux, and trite truisms about virtue, with an equally good grace, for it was all seasoned by Bella.

When he went away, to go back to the little inn where he was staying, his uncle asked him to come again to-morrow, and he accepted with a readiness that astonished even himself, when he thought of it in connection with the past as he walked along in the quiet moonlight.

“Well, what do you think of my plan, mother?” asked Norman, as the two sat in the old lady’s private room, after Armine was gone and Bella was in bed, and after he had unfolded to her the scheme which had been growing in his mind all that evening, ever since it first dawned there, as he walked through the valley with his nephew.

"I will have no hand in it; it is outraging the laws of both God and man!" cried Mrs. Brinkworth, with a vehemence which was partly caused by that hypocrisy that had become a second nature to her, and partly by her long acting of religion having really instilled into her a little more reverence for things human and divine than that possessed by her son.

"It is time that you lay aside entirely this mask of holiness when you are with me, mother," he said sternly. "It is like the man who, on his way to the gallows, insisted on having an umbrella because it rained."

"The world would cry out in horror if ever this matter were to come to light," she exclaimed, still sticking to her colours.

"I know it has been your practice all your life to hold out to the world a soiled

hand in a white glove. You fancy no one sees the stains through, but you are greatly mistaken, old lady," and he laughed tauntingly.

"But this scheme is too bold to be safely carried out."

"Nothing venture nothing have," cried Brinkworth. "We, for our venture, shall have a rare and rich reward of vengeance."

"Yes, it would be a rare revenge," she answered, her blood evidently warming at his words, and her eyes beginning to glow fiercely. "This is a dark plot, but it is a righteous vengeance; and the end justifies the means."

"That's right, mother; you always arrive at the same point as I do, though you go by a more round-about road—the path of virtue, I believe you call it, don't you? I suppose you fancy that the few shreds of

conscience you still have left are less likely to be torn off on it than if you followed me over hedges of right and through ditches of wrong straight to our object."

"If it were not a righteous vengeance, I would not consent to do this," repeated the old hypocrite, perhaps partly taking in herself, for she had acted being religious for so long that she may really have believed she was so—at least a little.

"What are all the righteousness and respectability of the world?" said Norman, relapsing for a moment into his favourite strain—"why, nothing but bridles to hold in evil passions. Every man and woman would rush into sin and crime if it were not for fear of law and public shame. And what is all the happiness of the world?—why, nothing but a gilded plaster to cover the inflamed wounds of disappointment and an-

ger and jealousy which rankle in each human heart. After all, then, bringing a little more sin and sorrow on this earth is a matter of small consequence."

"Why, then, have you made it the business of your life to bring about both, and why are you now toiling and striving towards that end?" asked his mother, satirical in her turn.

"Those who do good get only evil in return for it; and so I thought it least trouble to do evil at once," he said, answering the first part of her question with gloomy sarcasm.

Then, as the passion which at present ruled within woke up afresh, he added vindictively,

"I work to do harm now because I hate the man who has usurped the place which was rightfully mine."

“I suppose we must take Madelon into our confidence in this matter,” said Mrs. Brinkworth. “She and her husband may be necessary to us. . There is no knowing what turn things may take. Do you think she is to be trusted with this double weight of mystery?”

“I have always had more faith in Madelon than you have, mother. Not so much on account of her devoted attachment to you and me,”—and his eyes twinkled wickedly—“as because she is bound by a three-fold chain. There is the golden chain we first laid on her ; there is the iron chain of superstition her own tongue forged when she took that vow on the crucifix ; there is the chain of slavish love which ties her to her brutal husband ; for if those little extra supplies we give them from time to time for special diligence in our service should

fail, many of his low desires would have to go unsatisfied."

"Twice lately, when I have called on her unexpectedly, I have found her in tears," said the old lady, thoughtfully. "I do not like these melting moods; they look like the qualms of a woman whose firmness is beginning to break down."

"Madelon cries, no doubt, for about as good reasons as the rest of her sex—because she has seen a winding-sheet in the candle, or because her neighbour next door has more flowers in her bonnet than herself, or simply because she has nothing else to do."

"There is one person who will, I am afraid, give us some trouble," said Mrs. Brinkworth.

"Why, mother, you are as full of doubts and fears to-night as you used to be on the stage when you were acting the for-

lorn damsel in a forest. But who is this object of your alarm ?”

“Monica Midhurst, the writer of those letters.”

“Monica Midhurst, the novelist, had better content herself with the romances she weaves in her own lively mind. If she should thrust herself unasked-for into a romance of real life she may perhaps find it a less pleasant thing.”

“Every line of her letters shows that she is a woman with a brain and a will. If she knew a friend of hers to be in danger, I am certain she would not sit down quietly.”

“Commend me to a woman for seeing through a stone wall ! In a girl’s handwriting she can find certain signs that she is a flirt ; in the back of a man’s head she can read that he is a tyrant.”

"I dreamt last night that I was trying to hold this woman Monica Midhurst's head under water, but she pulled me down and tried to drown me instead. We had a long struggle, and one of us prevailed, but when I woke trembling I could not remember which."

"Dreams!—what are dreams? The shadowy reflections of this hollow life."

"I dreamt I was walking over thin ice, which broke beneath my feet, the night before I heard of your father's treachery," said she in a low voice.

This woman, who was bold enough to make a solemn mockery of religion, had, nevertheless, her superstitions. Human nature is a complex web.

"I fear, mother, your nerve is failing. You will soon be good for nothing but weak tea and weaker scandal," said the son irreverently.

"No, my nerve is not failing, she answered, with a touch of sadness in her voice. "Should this woman, Monica Midhurst, try to come between us and our righteous vengeance, she will find out quickly that it is not. But, mark my words, if she ever stand opposed to us, she will be no weak enemy."

"The old lioness is awake again! I thought I could stir her up!" cried Norman, with a laugh.

"I feel no compunction at leading this boy Armine Marani into harm. He is a predestined vessel of wrath, as his mother was. I can see it in his face," said Mrs. Brinkworth, her eyes glowing with that hatred which, as an inheritance, she bestowed first on her daughter and now on her grandson.

"Mother, he is the only one in the whole

business for whom I feel the smallest touch of pity. When I think of bringing evil upon him I see my sister's face smiling up at me as she used to smile when, on my coming home each evening from school, she ran as a toddling baby to meet me at the door with cries of joy."

"A baby!" repeated the old woman with bitter scorn. "Yes, in truth she was a baby to the end. No courage, no pride, no self-sustaining firmness. The first vagabond who whispered in her ear a word of foolish flattery could lead her away where he pleased."

"Poor Emily was at least more lucky in her marriage than you were, mother, when you espoused my respected step-father," said the son coolly.

Crooked as was his moral vision on most points, he saw on this one correctly and

well. He felt that his mother had always been unjust and unkind to the sister, his boyish love for whom even yet at times rang in sweet echoes round his cold withered heart, and for once he was angry with what was a generous anger.

"Your father's wrongs against me hurried me into that marriage," she retorted; "but let us not wake up the past, our hands are full enough with the present, I think."

"We must indeed do what we have to do as quickly as we can, or Frederick Oakleigh may come home before we are ready for him."

"His last letter spoke of sailing very soon. He may be even now on the way," answered she uneasily.

"What we want to do will not take up very much time. I believe the fire we wish to kindle is already alight."

“I suppose we must ask that boy to stay in our house. I cannot endure the thought of having him so constantly near me, because he often, in look and voice, reminds me of his mother, but what is necessary for our purpose must be done.”

“Yes, I mean to call upon him, and ask him, to-morrow morning.”

“I wonder that memories of the past don't make him draw back from us. He is a fool, no doubt—he inherits the cap and bells from both his parents; but I am not quite sure that he will come to stay with us.”

“Don't you fear, mother, about our landing the fish—we have too pretty a fly on the hook for him to slip away from it. But now to bed, and to-morrow to business. You, mother, must away to Pau, to put Madelon up to what is going on, and to

make her take fresh vows of secrecy, and I will go and look after my dear nephew," and his lips curled with an infernal smile. His eyes caught the gleam of wicked light playing around his mouth, and flashed and glowed with it till he closed them in sleep.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SCULPTOR AND HIS MODEL.

ARMINE MARANI accepted readily enough the invitation to stay a few days in his uncle's house. "These people are my mother's nearest relations," he thought. "No doubt they were in a certain degree unkind to her—I know that from the way in which she used to speak of them. But she bore them no malice; and gentle and forgiving as she always was, I am sure she would be well pleased at the breach between them and me being healed. My uncle is a very pleasant companion,

though at times he speaks rather more cynically of men and things than I like; but I daresay a good deal of knocking about in the world inclines a man to talk in that sort of strain. As for my grandmother, I wish there were not quite so much religious cant about her—it is so tiresome; but after all she may really mean a little of it. No doubt they are neither of them patterns of virtue; but the world is not full of saints, and I am certain that (even if they should be worse than they seem), at my present age, and with my matured opinions, they can do me no harm.” And he stroked the down on his chin with the air of a Nestor. “A man can’t live all his days like a school-girl. He must walk in rough and miry places, and look upon ugly sights, and meet temptation, in order that he may withstand it.

I know Monica would agree with me in this. My old childish dread of these relations must, I believe, have arisen a good deal from my being a nervous boy, and from my having so lately lost that mother's love, in contrast with which all other care must of necessity have seemed cold. I am really pleased to have the opportunity of seeing a little more of my cousin Bella. Fond as I am of psychological studies, I am sure her character will be very interesting to me. Some day I will describe her to Monica, and she may find in her useful material for a novel. When I go back to my studio, my first work shall be the bust of a female head, of which Bella shall be the model. I have little doubt I shall be able to do it from memory. I will call it Faust's Margaret, or Imogen, or something of that sort, and will show it in the next

Exhibition. I am glad to be staying in the house with her, that I may study her face for this purpose. Even in this, my holiday time, I feel that I ought to be thinking about business, and on the look-out for subjects. I believe Goethe says something of that kind somewhere, and so it must be a right feeling for an artist."

Such were Armine's thoughts as he walked towards his uncle's villa; and thus it appears that he went to stay there chiefly for the strictest business reasons. The days during this visit passed very quickly away for Marani. In the morning Armine and his uncle and Bella generally started (the lady on horseback, the gentlemen walking at her side) for some long expedition, which ended at noon in a pic-nic deep in some shady valley, or on a breezy mountain slope. In the evening they came back

to cozy little dinners and lively chat.

Norman Brinkworth could be, when it pleased him—and now it did please him—the most agreeable of light talkers. Racy anecdote about European celebrities, apt remarks upon the leading topics of the day, slight, sparkling touches upon men and manners, all came forth from his lips in an animated, yet easy flow. Now and then Armine would have a momentarily uncomfortable feeling, when his uncle forgot himself so far as to let drop a few of those words of heartless bitter sarcasm which were so constantly in his mouth, when he showed himself in his real character. At such times it was to Marani as if, in the midst of a light, wavy, waltz-melody, there suddenly sounded the laughter of an evil spirit. But Brinkworth quickly saw the mistake he had made, and, with the

tact and self-control which were peculiarly his own, first wiped away the bad impression he had given with an airy jest, and then set a double watch on his tongue, to keep it from transgressing again.

Of his grandmother Armine saw but little; he was so much out of doors, and the old lady spent so much of her time in her own room. When, however, he was in her company, she treated him kindly, though sometimes she favoured him with a fragmentary sermon, of which the young sculptor heard very little; because, whenever he saw the old lady inclined to get on this tack, he managed (for strictly business reasons, of course), to employ his eyes so entirely in the contemplation of his fair model that his ears, finding they were left to themselves, took a holiday. Only occasionally did his grand-

to very little dinners and lively chat.

Norman Brinkworth could be, when it pleased him—and now it did please him—the most agreeable of light talkers. Racy anecdote about European celebrities, apt remarks upon the leading topics of the day, slight, sparkling touches upon men and manners, all came forth from his lips in an animated, yet easy flow. Now and then Anne would have a momentarily uncomfortable feeling, when his uncle forgot himself so far as to let drop a few of those words of heartless bitter sarcasm which were so constantly in his mouth, when he showed himself in his real character. At such times it was to Marasia as if, in the midst of a light, wavy, waltz-melody, there suddenly sounded the laughter of an evil spirit. But Brinkworth quic¹⁻¹ the mistake he had made, and

fact and at

his own re-

sion in

them as

keep in

Ch

little

the

her

her

though

with

the

which

which

the

the

by
a
or
er
er
ti-
The
by
ung
with
when

those sparks of bright, clear intellect shone out in her, he saw in them precious ear-nests of what she would be when she had entirely recovered from past suffering. As for her beauty, it appeared to him exactly the sort of beauty that he always wanted to find.

She grew every day more intimate with Armine, and every day, while he was near her, that old look was less frequently upon her face. She chatted with him as if they had been brought up in the same nursery. She exacted from him, with graceful imperiousness, a hundred little services—now calling upon him to hold her skein of silk, now to scramble after a flower for her hair, and now to lay stepping-stones in some mountain stream, so that her little feet could trip across with ease. She listened with a look of simple, almost won-

dering interest that charmed the sculptor as he talked of his art. As they sat in the dreary twilight, she made him sing to her in the clear rich tenor that was his birthright from his Italian sires.

This latter amusement of the young people was, however, put an end to somewhat abruptly. One evening Armine, who hitherto had chosen all the newest and most fashionable songs then in vogue, in order that he might appear a man of the world in the eyes of the young lady, being rather at a loss for something fresh, struck into an air that was of a much older date than any he had yet sung, and that, several years ago, he had learnt because it was a favourite with Monica. He had scarcely got through the first half of the melody, when Bella, whose features, though he had not noticed it, had been working

ever since he began, started up, and cried out wildly, "Where does it come from?—oh! where does it come from?" and then fell back insensible upon the sofa where she had been sitting.

Brinkworth was in the next room to the one where the young people were. The fact was, he was always (sometimes without their knowing it) within earshot, wherever they might be, and occasionally provoked Marani a good deal by coming in when he did not seem to be wanted. Through the half-open door he heard Bella's cry, and the exclamations of surprise and alarm that followed from Armine, and thereupon hastened to them. He found the young lady lying unconscious, and Armine leaning over her, trying to bring her to herself in a very helpless, man-like sort of way. Brinkworth raised

her, and asked Marani rather sharply what had happened, though he knew well enough all the while, by means of the open door. Armine told him the whole, and as he listened, a peculiar look, which the nephew noted, not without some degree of wonder, passed for a moment over the uncle's face. Norman carried her hurriedly to her own room, saying she would be quieter there, and Armine saw no more of her that night.

After a while, however, his uncle came back to him, and told him that Bella was better, but that, as music sometimes greatly affected and excited her, he begged him not to sing to her any more.

"Her father was a first-rate musician," he said in conclusion, "and any air that was a favourite of his always agitates her terribly. It is, therefore, best that she

should hear nothing of that sort, as, of course, it is impossible to know what melodies may have been in old days familiar to her. I am sorry, dear boy, to stop up your harmonious throat, but women's nerves can never be treated like reasonable things."

Marani, of course, could only promise to obey.

All the night Armine was haunted by that wild cry. "They were very odd words," he thought, "which she spoke; but perhaps, in moments of extreme sudden emotion, people hardly know what they say; and, besides, her mind has certainly not yet recovered its normal tone. My uncle's look, too, when I told him what had happened, was very singular. Is it possible there can be anything behind about her? Can my uncle and grandmother have misused her,

and be keeping her in any sort of restraint?"

As that thought passed through his mind, his cheek glowed and his eyes flashed, and just at that moment it was lucky for his uncle Norman he was not at his dear boy's side. But Armine quickly repressed these violent feelings as unjust and unreasonable, and in the morning met Norman with his usual manner—though he resolved to watch more closely the relations between Bella and the Brinkworths.

Next day the lady seemed perfectly recovered from her swoon of last night, and, as she did not speak of it, Marani also did not. He often longed to ask her something about her past, but respect for her grief, and fear of too violently agitating her, sealed his lips on this point.

From his watching her and the Brinkworths together, Armine learned very little. They seemed to be on very common-place, matter-of-fact terms with each other. Norman, indeed, would sometimes call Bella by playful names, and often consulted her wishes, which friendly attentions she took coolly, it is true, but without any apparent dislike.

Though he spoke much to Bella of his thoughts and feelings, Armine never named to her Monica Midhurst. He spoke of Mrs. Penlewin as the kind old lady who had brought him up, but of Mrs. Penlewin's niece he never said a word. The fact was, he did not quite know how his fair model might take the news of his having a close female friend, in no way related to him, of a marriageable age; and besides, there had been passages between him and Monica

which he did not exactly wish to reach for the present Bella's ears, but which might have leaked out had he named Monica.

Nor did he in his letters home speak much more than casually of his meeting with his relations. Monica had, indeed, said that most likely his uncle and grandmother were not such formidable beings as his childish imagination had represented them to him, but he was not at all certain what Monica and Mrs. Penlewin might say did they hear of the close intimacy in which he was living with people who were, it could not be denied, of a somewhat doubtful character, and of his growing—well, it was impossible to tell what he was growing—about Norman Brinkworth's niece, and so it was best not to write anything of the matter. Mrs. Penlewin and Monica were both very sensible

women, it is true ; but then the most sensible women have their fancies and their fears in cases where a man sees no possible danger. Thus he reasoned, and he therefore wrote in this strain :

“ Whom do you think I have renewed my acquaintance with ? I have actually met my uncle and grandmother, and I find them, after all, very common-place, passable sort of folk. My uncle is really a pleasant man of the world, and my grandmother is kind, though rather prosy. They have a villa in this lovely valley of Argélés, and I am staying with them for a day or two. They have a nice girl, a distant cousin of mine, with them.”

Then the letter wandered off into raptures about the varied tints of the foliage on the mountains.

One evening Marani and Bella stood alone

on the balcony. The green valley was in shadow, but the sunlight still rested on the highest snow-peak, which looked like a gigantic rosy lamp hung from the blue sky. The Angelus bell from a distant church came vibrating on the breeze.

"Life must slip away very softly here for a native of this valley, who has no higher ambition than to be able to say that he has once climbed to the top of the peak opposite his cottage window," said Armine.

"I could be happy anywhere, I think, if it were not for vague, restless longings," replied she, her face taking once more that strange leap from girlhood into middle age.

"Have you often such longings?" he asked, thinking he might question her about her present, if not about her past.

"Yes, often, and they always come when the sun is brightest, and the birds sing most sweetly, and the flowers are gayest. I have, too, at times, a feeling that there is something which is rightfully mine that I have not got," she answered, in the slow tone of one speaking in a dream.

"But you are generally the merriest and most light-hearted of us all," he said, wishing to dispel what seemed to him her gloomy, sickly fancies.

"Am I light-hearted? Well, I don't quite know about that. I know I am often not quite pleased with things. For instance, my name, Bella, does not exactly please me. I somehow want it to sound a little different, and yet I can't tell how, though I think and think about it."

"What a capricious whim! Why, your name is such a pretty one."

"And then," she went on, without seeming to heed his soothing words—"and then it never quite pleases me to call Mr. Lynwood uncle."

"But he is very kind to you, is he not?" asked Armine, quickly.

"Yes, he is very kind," she repeated; "but"—and she hesitated a little—"but there are things I want to know about which he and his mother won't——"

Here Uncle Norman, who all the while had been listening behind the curtain at the open window, thought fit to step out on the balcony to wrap a shawl round his dear niece, because the evening was growing chill.

CHAPTER XIV.

A COUNCIL.

“NO, I am not going abroad among those nasty French people. When you ask for a cup of hot strong tea, they bring you a half-cold mess three parts milk and one part coffee. If you order a boiled rabbit for dinner, than which nothing can be better, if allowed to simmer for a long time and served up with a rich sauce of melted butter just flavoured with onion, they put before you a cat. If you want to give your face a good scouring, as every woman should do who wishes to keep her complex-

ion healthy, and to be admired by sensible men, you find on your wash-hand stand a tea-cup and no soap. I have heard of all their heathenish ways, and you are not going to catch me leaving British ground to wander among them."

Such were Mrs. Penlewin's first words when the plan was laid before her, which Monica and Charles Wilford had made, for their all going on a trip to the south of France, to join Armine Marani and come home with him. Miss De Vellembie, who had by this time laid down her sceptre at Golden Mount, and was now resting on her honours, and a comfortable capital in the three per cents., and who at this present time was staying with Mrs. Penlewin and Monica, was also to be of the party. Monica had, with much difficulty, appeased the good lady's travelling fears, and prevailed

upon her to say she would go, by describing to her the rich harvest of historical memories she would gather on her journey.

"We will take such care of you, auntie dear, that you really won't know you are not at home," said Monica, in answer to Mrs. Penlewin's torrent of objections. "Mr. Wilford will act as your courier, and I have no doubt also as your cook at a pinch, and I will always make your bed."

"Beds; yes, indeed they are beds," repeated the old lady scornfully. "Spring boards, which throw you out again on the carpet before you can lie down. Give me a good old-fashioned English feather-bed, stuffed as full as a sausage and as soft as cream, and a regular genuine four-poster as large as Abraham's tent in the Scriptures, in which Sarah baked the cakes, like the pattern to

all good housewives that she was. That's the sort of bed for a Christian woman."

"But, my dear ma'am, you should consider the delightful sentiments we shall enjoy," said Miss De Vellembie. "What majestic shadows will surround us in the Tuileries; the brave Henri Quatre, the gentle Marie Antoinette. How shall we with the mind's eye behold them at the banquet, at the ball, in the reception-room! But, Monica, my dear, are you quite sure there is no small-pox now in Paris? I won't go unless you take half-a-dozen disinfecting cups with you."

"I will promise to take a full store of everything that can be possibly necessary for the journey except patience, and of that commodity every one must provide an independent stock," cried Monica laughing.

"What do I care about your French

kings and queens!" exclaimed Mrs. Penlewin. "Most of them were no better than they should be, I know from the books I read when I was a school-girl. His Majesty George III. was the king for me. He led a respectable, God-fearing life, and, king though he was, never allowed any waste in his household; and he had a good wife and a fine family, as every true Englishman should have," and she cast a reproachful look at Charles Wilford, for his failure in these two latter specialities of the model Briton.

"I hope we shall be able to make a *détour*, to visit Nismes and its amphitheatre," said Miss De Vellembie. "It has always been one of my chief wishes to sit in the midst of that monument of Roman splendour, and to picture to myself the deadly struggle of the gladiator and the

shout of the populace. It will all be most delightful, if only the horses everywhere are quiet. Mr. Wilford, will you promise me, whenever we have a carriage, to make particular inquiries as to whether they shake their heads or whisk their tails."

"I will exhort each horse you go with about his duty, as if he were a refractory Sunday-school boy," answered the Rector, very demurely.

"I suppose," said Mrs. Penlewin, "the moment I land they will come bowing and scraping and grimacing round me, as if they were a parcel of apes and I the barrel-organ to which they were dancing. They are nothing but a frog-eating nation of posture-masters."

"Begging your pardon, dear ma'am," cried Miss De Vellembie, who thought it her duty, as an instructress of youth, to

speak a word for the French language—
 “Begging your pardon, dear ma’am, I think you hold somewhat mistaken ideas about the most polished nation in Europe. With what tender care did France cherish the graces throughout the rude Middle Ages! I am looking forward to hear, the moment I tread the French shore, the language of Corneille and Racine spoken by even the porter who carries my luggage. I suppose the steamers from Dover to Calais never meet with any serious accidents. I can well imagine what an inspiring sensation it is to be rocked in the cradle of the deep, and I should delight in putting to sea, like Cleopatra, in a gilded galley with purple sails; but I don’t particularly wish to be drowned.”

“You will never persuade me, Miss De Vellembie, that it does not take four

Frenchmen at least to make an Englishman," answered the old lady stoutly. "Nothing convinces me more that the young people of the present day are all degenerating and going melancholy mad than the idea they have of taking a holiday. Why, in my time, when a young fellow wanted a little amusement, he went to stay for a month in a house full of the prettiest girls in the neighbourhood. By day he was away from the house, as every man should be, whether for business or pleasure, with his gun or following the hounds, and in the evening there were blindman's-buff and forfeits, and at ten precisely, when the girls went off to get their beauty-sleep, rum and lemons. But this boy Armine, when he gets a little rest from his work, goes rambling off into foreign parts to make-believe at fun with

such dreary jokes as drinking luke-warm water and calling it soup, pretending to understand a parcel of gibberish of which he knows about every twentieth word, and climbing the mountains before breakfast to stand among grey mists and catch a sore throat."

"Well, now, I can quite enter into the pleasure of roaming over the mountain-summits," said Miss De Vellembie, in a tone of calm superiority. "I have often thought how I should have liked to have been Diana, and, with buskins on my feet, with my green belt upon my shoulder, and my quiver at my back, to have wandered over hill and dale, through the green wood and by the crystal stream."

Monica and Wilford exchanged mirthful glances at the idea of Miss De Vellembie taking a walk in the classical costume she

had just described. Mrs. Penlewin, who looked upon the ex-schoolmistress as a sort of harmless, learned lunatic, who was always talking in long words, which no one understood, least of all Miss De Vellembie herself, went on in her own strain.

"I believe there's not a Frenchwoman who thinks about anything all day except dressing her hair and showing her ankles," she cried. "And, besides, they are such slovenly hussies. If you were to call upon any of them at twelve in the morning, you would find them in their dressing-gowns."

"If Miss De Vellembie would wish to represent Diana, you may certainly be likened to Juno, Mrs. Penlewin, in your hatred of this one unlucky nation," said the Rector, laughing.

"For shame, Mr. Wilford, for saying such words; I am no more a Juno than you

are!" retorted she, indignantly. The old lady's ideas of mythology were hazy, not to say obscure, and she had vague suspicions as to what a Juno might be.

"On the borders of Spain, my dear Monica," said Miss De Vellembie, who seemed to think that the minds of her former pupils could never be too much improved—"on the borders of Spain we shall see the Isle of Pheasants, where many a bashful and lovely young Spanish princess received for the last time the blessing of her honoured papa and dear mamma, before she entered upon the solemn but pleasing duties of the matrimonial state. I suppose you never hear of brigands now in the north of Spain? A brigand is a very picturesque object in a sketch of mountain scenery, but it might not be so pleasant to be carried off by one."

"No, there are no brigands, but there are plenty of swindlers," said Mrs. Penlewin, contemptuously. "Every innkeeper and every railway official will pick your pockets, and grin while he is about it, and expect you to thank him for the polite way in which he has done it."

"Ah! my dear ma'am," cried Miss De Vellembie, "you were born for pounds, shillings, and pence, and all that is practical in life; but some are vain enthusiasts, alas, for soul and beauty. It will to me be a pleasure to watch the lights and shadows on the mountain-sides, and note the gorgeous tints which in that southern clime paint at eve the western sky. Monica, my love, be sure you take a bottle of chlorodyne in your travelling-bag. Murray says the water in the Pyrenees is often not wholesome. But, above all, my dear, don't forget Keating's powders."

"Surely, auntie, dear, when you hear Miss De Vellembie's raptures, and see us all so anxious to go, you won't disappoint us?" said Monica, turning coaxingly to the old lady.

"I suppose I must give way to you all. The keeper is often obliged to do mad things, just to humour the lunatics," answered Mrs. Penlewin, with one of those bright, saucy smiles which made people still understand why Mr. Penlewin fell in love with her.

"There's an old darling!" said Monica, kissing her.

"I suppose that boy Armine, because he has been a few weeks in the country, thinks himself now quite a resident, and will show us about his Fool's Paradise, as if it belonged to him," said Mrs. Penlewin.

"I hope Armine will be glad to see us.

It is a fortnight now since we heard from him," answered Monica, rather thoughtfully.

"You have not had a letter from him, have you, since that one in which he told of his meeting with his uncle and grandmother?" asked Wilford.

"No," answered Monica; and then added, with a slight trouble in her clear eyes, "I hope he has not been a great deal with these relations. I daresay they are not such very dreadful people, but still I don't think his uncle can be a very good companion for him."

"Oh! Armine is old enough now to take care of himself," replied the Rector, with manly indifference.

"A boy can't be kept all his days in a band-box, like his mother's best bonnet," said the old lady, decisively. "My Pen-

lewin used to say that girls are sugar-plums, but boys are marbles."

"You will write to tell him we are coming, I suppose?" asked Wilford.

"No," answered Monica. "I think it will be more fun to come suddenly upon him. I know, from the plan of his journey, which he made before he started, and which he sent me, that he will be at Bagnères de Luchon on the eighth of September. We shall be there on that day, and if we have to wait for him a little, it does not matter."

"Shall we come back by Pau?" asked Wilford.

"Yes," replied Monica. "And I am very glad to go there, that I may try to find out something about Stella Oakleigh. I cannot help fancying there must be some mystery, or, at least, some mistake. As

soon as I get to Pau, I shall go out to look for the Villa Grimaldi, and if there is such a house in the place, I shall make every inquiry at it."

"Stella's conduct is utterly incomprehensible to me," said Miss De Vellembie. "She was always so very fond of you, Monica; and besides, I should not have thought a young lady whom I had brought up would have behaved so rudely even to a mere acquaintance."

"It is so incomprehensible that I am often haunted with a fear that something must be going very wrong," said Monica.

"But that is not possible, since just before you wrote your two letters you had heard from the agent at Oakleigh Hall that Mrs. Oakleigh was quite well," rejoined Miss De Vellembie.

"Yes, that is true; but still, I can

sooner believe in an impossibility than in Stella's forgetting me," answered Monica, persistently.

"You won't find Monica give up her opinions very easily, Miss De Vellembie, I can tell you from experience," said Mrs. Penlewin, glancing first at Wilford, and then at her niece. What with long habit—what with the love she bore Monica—what with finding that literature had not at all unsexed her, Mrs. Penlewin had grown to be proud of her niece as an authoress; but still she could not help sometimes thinking regretfully of what might have been.

As for Charles Wilford, he was growing in his inmost heart to think (though he did not exactly say it openly) that it had been, on the whole, best for him when Monica refused to be his wife, and when her image

had come between him and other women. Not that he did not still like Monica; he had always a warm, strong friendship—a deep reverence for her. Not that he was a churlish man, who rejoiced in living separate from his fellows. The Rector watched often by the fever-stricken bed from which even near relations shrank; the little children in the school loved him; the neighbouring squires and clergy called him a jolly, genial fellow. But Charles Wilford was daily slipping deeper into his easy bachelor ways; and when a man has once got thoroughly into those ways, it takes a good deal to pull him out of them.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TWO FACES.

“JOY go with 'em ! and if they do never come back they won't be no great loss. Old Missus have been a-weighing and a-measuring and a-counting and a-giving out for the last week past, as if we poor sar-vents was so many convicts ; and yesterday, I do declare, it was reg'lar maze Monday with her ; and now she be off to the fur-reigners, and I hope they will like her.”

Such were the cook's words as the carriage drove away.

“Well, now, I should be very sorry if any harm should come to Miss Midhurst,” said the housemaid. “She be quite the lady, and do never go about poking into corners of pantry and kitchen, as if she was a dog looking for a rabbit. The only thing about her that don’t seem to me quite Christian-like is her writing down such a lot of lies as she do, and getting them printed as if they was all Gospel truth.”

“Better if she had a-took and a-married Mr. Wilford,” rejoined cook with a scornful toss. “He would have had her, I know, at one time. I have seen him as he went down the garden, walking one way and looking another, like a crab going to Ireland, just that he might catch a last glimpse of her at the window. Better if she’d took and a-married un than be always

a-hatching up in her head of such old stuff."

"Well, Patty, there must be all sorts to make a world ; but if every woman bided an old maid there would be no soldiers nor sailors. But let us make the most of old nip-cheese being away, and send for our chaps to come in to supper."

While her viceroy, the cook, was thus keeping a merry house in her absence, Mrs. Penlewin and her party were having a very prosperous journey.

Across the Channel, though it only blew a gentle breeze, Miss De Vellembie insisted upon it that she was out in a terrific storm, and read fragments of the Litany. In the Louvre she was overcome at once with the thought of Raphael, Robespierre and Richelieu, and with fears lest the lady who stood near her in the grey woollen shawl should

lately have had the scarlet fever. In the train she now caused polite French gentlemen the greatest distress from their inability to understand her when she addressed them in quaint phrases, in which she copied, as nearly as possible, the style of Racine's heroines ; and now made nervous English ladies faint by suggesting all sorts of probable accidents. At the *table-d'hôte* she by turns lamented over the indigestible properties of veal, and wondered whether this was at all like the classical feasts of the ancients. In her bed-rooms, she spent half the night searching for rats, trap-doors, and thieves, and the other half in talking about the moonlight on the church-spires.

Mrs. Penlewin's chief concern in the steamer was that a housemaid was much needed in the cabin. In the Louvre her

principal remark was that she should not have liked to live in the days when the gentlemen and ladies whom the statues represented were abroad, as their style of dress must have been so unpleasant in cold windy weather. In the train her soul was much vexed by the bonnets of the lady's-maids travelling with English families. At the *table-d'hôte* she greatly disturbed the minds of the *garçons* by declaring the wine to be vinegar, and by wanting the receipt of every dish she liked. In her rooms she performed such wonderful cabalistic ceremonies with her bed, that next morning all the chambermaids in the hotel came to see it as a sight. The churches were, she said, very beautiful places, but she thought those idle fellows, the priests, who were always standing about in them, might keep them cleaner. She approved of the

caps of the French women-servants, but took exception at the way in which they shrugged their shoulders. She insisted upon talking to every foreigner in English pronounced like French, and thus caused the most conflicting opinions to be held about her nationality.

As for Monica and Wilford, they were outwardly very quiet and common-place travellers. They were both too old for much enthusiasm; and so, though they felt and thought a good deal, they said very little. Yet still they enjoyed everything with greater zest from being together, for a sympathetic mind is never more necessary to a man or woman than in travelling. They bore with all the peculiarities of their two fellow-travellers with the utmost good temper, and, on the whole, they were a comfortable, merry party of tourists, who

neither rushed from town to town, and from picture-gallery to picture-gallery, as if they were under a solemn vow to see so much in so many days, nor yet dawdled about in one place till they had counted the stones in it.

It was very late in the evening when they drew near Luchon, which was for the present the goal of their journey. The spirited little grey vetturino horse, who, with his companion, the steady-going old brown mare, had brought them from Bigorre, and who, in the morning, had caused Miss De Vellembie some trouble of mind, had given in for the last few miles, because, as his driver said, he had been at first "trop vaillant," thus showing plainly enough that his sires must have had more to do with the cart-stable than with the race-course.

It was a warm, oppressive evening. One

of those hot winds, common in the south of Europe, which feel as if they came straight from the mouth of a red-hot furnace, was blowing. Monica was very tired, for they had been up early that morning, and felt as if she should be glad when the various ceremonies, at which every night she had to assist in the rooms of both her lady friends, were over, and she should be able to lie down in her own bed. Before long this thought grew indistinct, and the bonnet of Miss De Vellembie, who was sitting opposite her, became gradually confused in her mind with the dried crocodile's skin preserved in the church of St. Bertram, which they had stopped to see on the way.

Soon her head, which had been for some minutes swaying about doubtfully, took a decided resolution and sank on her shoulder ;

and Monica, with her old lover at her side and in the middle of the Pyrenees, was dozing in the most prosaic manner.

All at once she was aroused by hearing the names of Armine and Stella loudly spoken near her. She awoke with a start, and saw flash past her, distinct in the moonlight, and yet only visible for a second, the faces of those two, whose names had just sounded in her ears. Confused by her sudden awakening, and by the unexpected vision, Monica had for a moment a vague sense of having gone wrong, her heart beat quickly and she uttered a faint cry, but she was speedily calmed and brought back to the real state of things by hearing Charles Wilford's familiar voice say, in a matter-of-fact tone, close to her,

"Did you say Armine was in that carriage, Mrs. Penlewin? I did not

see, for I was looking the other way."

"I am sure it was Armine," said Mrs. Penlewin.

"And I am positive that the lady was Stella," cried Miss De Vellembie.

Monica now understood that what had happened was simply that a light carriage with a gentleman and lady in front, and another gentleman behind, to whom no one of their party had paid particular attention, had just driven quickly past, and that in one of the pair Mrs. Penlewin had recognized Armine, and Miss De Vellembie Stella in the other.

"I never saw Mrs. Oakleigh, though I have heard so much about her," said Mrs. Penlewin. "But I know I cannot mistake my own boy."

"And I have not the pleasure of personally knowing Mr. Marani," rejoined Miss

De Vellembie; "for when I have stayed with you he has always been away; but if that was not Stella Oakleigh, it was her ghost."

"Monica," said her aunt, "you surely must have recognized them both."

"Yes, it was Armine and Stella," answered she, speaking slowly, for it seemed to her so strange suddenly to have seen side by side the two who had lately so much occupied her mind, but whom she had never connected with each other in her thoughts. "It is odd rather, I think, that they should be together."

"I don't see anything very singular in it," said Wilford, with a man's readiness to get rid of a mystery. "You know that Mrs. Oakleigh is in this part of France. She and Armine must have met somewhere and fallen into conversation at a *table-*

d'hôte, or in a public drawing-room. In talking they must have found out that they are both great friends of yours. This would be sure to make them intimate, and they would most likely take excursions together."

Charles Wilford's simple explanation seemed in truth both natural and possible; but the ladies, especially the two elder ones, still talked over the matter as ladies will, and put it into a hundred different lights.

"I shall go the first thing to-morrow and look for them both all over Luchon," said Monica, in conclusion.

"You may do as you like, my dear Monica," said Miss De Vellembie, with much dignity. "But I shall make no efforts to see Stella Oakleigh, for after the way in which she has behaved I think it

is her place to make the first advances."

"Do you think they recognized us at all?" asked Monica. "Did they look at us? I must plead guilty to a doze, and so I did not see as much of them as I ought to have done."

"No, I don't think they did. They seemed to be talking too eagerly together," answered Mrs. Penlewin.

"Besides, in the moonlight, and passing so quickly, and not dreaming of seeing any of us here, they were sure not to know us," said Wilford.

"I wonder who the gentleman was who was with them," said Mrs. Penlewin.

"Most likely it was Armine's uncle," answered Monica, and as she spoke there was a momentary trouble in her eyes.

Further discussion was now stopped by their entering Luchon. The little town

was full of that luxuriant overflow of life which sparkles, and buzzes, and flutters often throughout half the night beneath the mild sky of the south. Here a quack doctor mounted on a stage, and described in lively doggerel and with ready pantomime each drug as he held it up for sale. There a juggler with cup and ball carried on his rival antics. A troop of peasant girls went along, their musical *patois* ringing through the evening air, and their many-coloured dresses shimmering in the lamp-light. A band of tourists scampered past, their horses' hoofs the lighter for the nearness of the stable, and their own hearts for the fact of their having done the Pont de Venasque. The strains of a waltz floated from open windows, which showed perspectives of bright lights and whirling tarletan. A party of itinerant singers trolled a merry

chorus before a *pension*, and two dark-eyed Spanish children peeped out in their night-dresses at them, and clapped and laughed. To the left was a brilliantly lit *café* with a knot of young fashionables lounging before it. To the right was a little inn, around which stood swarthy muleteers, in broad-brimmed hats and crimson scarfs, leisurely unloading their mules, who jingled their bells despondingly, as though they thought bed and supper were a very long time coming.

At length, with a volley of cracks from his whip, and as brisk a trot as his tired horses could muster, the vetturino drew up before the hotel. Out hopped Mrs. Penlewin, as active as a lively little old bird, and looking very like one of gaudy plumage, in her green dress, mauve shawl, and red bonnet. It was her maxim that if people were

such fools as to travel at all, they should at least go without any luggage, and so she held no encumbrance in her neat little hands. Out stepped majestically Miss De Vellembie, with silk umbrella, and Murray, and a travelling bag that looked as if it must soon be ill from indigestion.

Several couriers, who stood around the door, earning their employers' money satisfactorily no doubt by displaying their own well cared for persons, turned up their noses at the new arrival, as being without the safe convoy of one of their honourable brotherhood. A group of gentlemen, who were occupied at once elegantly and contemptively in standing in every possible attitude expressive of idleness and staring at the smoke of their cigars, characterized Monica as not a bad-looking woman, Miss De Vellembie as a rum fish, and Mrs. Penlewin as an awfully jolly old thing. The

ladies on the balcony of the *premier étage* pronounced the whole party to be decidedly common. The lady's maids *au quatrième* branded Monica's hat (but too visible in the bright moonlight) as dowdy.

In happy unconsciousness (as we doubtless all often are on our way through life) of what was said of them, the party entered the hotel. The house was very full—an English milord with the gout, and a Russian princess, with a parrot and a poodle, having arrived that evening. It was only after much turning up of the eyes, and shrugging of the shoulders, on the part of landlady and chambermaids, that Monica, who generally acted as spokeswoman, managed to get rooms for the night. Throughout the whole of this parley Mrs. Penlewin considered herself to be acting as a most efficient auxiliary to her niece by making various feints of going to look for lodgings

elsewhere, which was, she said, the only way to outwit these rascally foreigners; who, however, in fact were not outwitted at all, they knowing, as well as they knew how they daily cheated the public, that Mrs. Penlewin would spend the night under their roof.

The rooms, after all, were but indifferent, and Monica had a good deal to go through before the two elder ladies were comfortably brought to anchor. Mrs. Penlewin insisted upon shaking out vigorously every article of her bedclothes, because she was sure that last night some nasty Frenchman had slept there. Miss De Vellembie found a creaking board in her room, and could not sleep till a water-jug, three pair of boots, and a candlestick were heaped upon it—to what use or end did not clearly appear. At length, with a sigh of relief, Monica went to her own room.

CHAPTER XVI.

THROUGH THE WINDOW.

MONICA'S sleeping-place in the hotel at Luchon was not a very inviting one. It was a little oddly-shaped room, divided by only a thin partition from the *salle à manger*. It had two small windows—one affording a view into a dirty little back court, and the other made in the partition, and looking into the *salle à manger* itself. The room had been originally used by the waiters, and for their convenience, and the handing in and out of spoons, and forks, and dishes, the latter little window had

been made. In this full season, however, a tiny iron bedstead had been set up in one corner, a thick curtain had been hung before the window in the partition, and this sanctuary of the *garçons* had been turned into a resting-place for young gentlemen and ladies, with Alpenstocks and sandwich-boxes, and imaginations. Notwithstanding all that had been done to make it comfortable, this little room could not be called attractive; but Monica was one of those happy travellers who can laugh at discomforts, and, besides, she was too tired to care much where she lay down, if she could only find a quiet resting-place. Charles Wilford had offered to change quarters with her, but his bed was out, and at some little distance off, and so Monica had preferred staying in the hotel.

While she was undressing, Monica, with-

out quite knowing why, thought a good deal of those two faces which had passed her that evening. Dear though Armine and Stella were both to her, she had somehow never put them together in her mind and heart. Her love for each had begun at such different periods of her life, and the two affections, though both strong, were so unlike. How would their minds work on each other, she wondered? Would an intimate sympathy quickly spring up between them; or would they talk that sort of civil, superficial talk which often keeps people who are in the same room in reality as far from each other as if they were in two different planets? She could not, try as she would, satisfactorily picture to herself those two together, and so, growing tired soon of the endeavour, she lay down and quickly fell asleep.

Those two faces, however, were still with her. They haunted her in her dreams, appearing in the most unexpected places. Now she was sitting with her aunt in the drawing-room at home, when suddenly they showed themselves in an opposite mirror. Now she was driving with her present travelling-companions up a deep woody glen, when all at once, multiplied a thousand-fold, they peeped at her out of every tree. Now she was in her familiar place at church, and, looking up, she saw them at the window. But though fantastic dreams thus crowded round her, none of them were terrible or grotesque enough to disturb her rest, and she slept soundly for several hours.

When at length she was awakened, she thought at first that she must still be dreaming, and that their voices instead of

their faces were now haunting her. She roused herself and listened. No, it was no dream. The voices of Armine and Stella were in truth sounding near her, and she was soon certain that they came from the *salle à manger*, but as the window was closed, she could distinguish no words.

“I will go to the little window and call them by their names. How startled they will be when they first hear my voice !”

Such was her quickly-formed thought. With this intention, and quite forgetful of Stella’s late apparent coldness, in the joy of seeing her again, she rose, hastily threw on her dressing-gown, smiling, as she did so, at the idea of the surprise she was about to cause her two friends, stole quietly to the partition window, and drew aside noiselessly a little bit of the curtain, keeping herself, however, for the present, concealed,

so that she might startle them the more when she spoke.

But how suddenly were the merry words frozen upon her lips. What was the sight which met her view? It was Stella clasped in Armine's arms. There was no one in the *salle à manger* except those two. It was too early for even a prying *garçon* to be there. Thus, in this public room, at early morn, the tender little scene could be enacted as comfortably as in a moonlit garden. The only drawback to the idyll was a table hard by, with a few empty bottles upon it.

For some seconds the two remained thus. For some seconds Monica stood motionless, gazing through the window. Astonishment, anger, and grief were too suddenly and violently aroused within her for her at first to give any outward sign of her feelings. No sound escaped her lips. She

moved not a finger. She was as one upon whom, in the midst of active life, a petrifying spell had fallen.

Before many moments, however, had passed, the little group in the *salle à manger* was disturbed. "Armine!" cried a loud man's voice, which rang through the partition and reached Monica's ear. The speaker was in the passage outside the *salle à manger*. Indeed, Uncle Norman, according to his usual practice, had been there all the time, and, through the half-open door, had heard everything. The pair started asunder, as pairs in like cases generally do, when a third person is near. They spoke no more, but hurried from the room.

When they had disappeared from her view, a cry as of one who stands on some desert shore, and watches the sail on which

his last hope is fixed vanish in the distance—a cry as of one whose strongest faith in life is shattered, burst from Monica's lips. The room seemed to spin round with her. There was a singing in her ears. She staggered backward, and fell on the bed insensible.

No one heeded that cry. It pierced the sleep of an old gentleman in the room above, who being just then dreaming a bold dream about rocks and cataracts, produced by the study of Murray, and a bottle of good claret before going to bed, believed it to be the scream of an eagle soaring above him. It reached the ears of a chamber-maid, who, with eyes still half shut, was beginning her progress through the passages, and who (her mind just now running a good deal on the matrimonial state, on account of certain tender advances lately

made by the Boots) concluded hazily that somewhere in that street a man was quarrelling with his wife. It was caught faintly by the hall-porter, who, with lagging steps and loving thoughts of the pillow he had just left, was creeping to his post, and who, knowing to his cost that the landlady was a virago, made up his mind that she was pulling her maidens out of bed earlier than quite pleased them.

The rooms of Mrs. Penlewin and Miss De Vellembie were both far off; thus Monica was left to come naturally to herself. With the slow return of consciousness there grew in her mind a dull sense of pain, such as we have in our bodies on awaking from a short sleep snatched in a time of physical suffering. Quickly, however, full recollection came back to her, and then everything was but too clear. Armine and Stella, the

two who were dearest to her on earth, were guilty, and guilty in a way which her high-toned woman's nature shrank to think of. Ever since she left her husband, Stella must have been sinking lower and lower, though she had unblushing boldness enough to write to him, as if she were still her former self. But when she received Monica's letters, she had not had the courage to dissimulate with the friend of her youth, and so she had taken refuge in silence. While he had been in the south of France Armine must have met her, and have been drawn into a dangerous intimacy with her, which must have quickly ripened into a strong passion. Monica thought of his inflammable half southern nature. She remembered the love that had once been poured out by him at her own feet. She considered Stella's attractions in mind and

person, and she could but too easily believe that all this might have happened.

When, with the calmness of despair, she had traced out thus far what had probably been the course of events, there came involuntarily (as she recalled what Armine, and yet more what Stella, had been) a revulsion of feeling, a moment of utter incredulity. But that bright gleam quickly passed. What could even the love and trust of many years do against the testimony of her own eyes? No, there was no escaping from the black truth. Stella had fallen, as the best beloved and fairest have fallen before her, and there was no extenuation for her.

But was there not some extenuation for Armine? His youth, his Italian nature, the subtle arts which had most likely been used to ensnare him—did not these plead

for him? Yes, they did a little, but only a little. What had availed all her long labour to build up this young man's character, if he thus fell at the first temptation? Why had she not taken his heart into her own safe keeping when he put it in her hands? She had given it back with tears, bidding him find one who could watch over it more carefully than she, the artist woman devoted to her art, could ever do. And now what had he done?

Monica's mind waded about thus in a swamp of desponding thoughts and vain questionings all the while she was dressing. But as she knelt and said her morning prayer, and rested on those words with which she had begun many a day of earnest work, more comforting ideas came. Might not Armine be saved from falling down a yet deeper precipice of sin? Might

not Stella be brought back, if not to her husband, at all events to her God. Yes, this might be done, and with that merciful God's help, she, Monica would do it.

Armine and Stella were most likely staying in this very inn; if not, she would look for them till she found them. Then she would speak to them in God's name, and in the name of their mothers; she would implore them by every memory of their childhood, and she would not give up till she had prevailed. Perhaps they had been led astray by evil companions. This thought made her remember Armine's meeting with his relations, and, woman-like, she at once jumped to the conclusion that the uncle and grandmother were at the bottom of the mischief, as far as Armine was concerned. This conviction brought yet more hope with it. She

prayed for strength and courage, and strength and courage came, and she rose calm from her knees.

She resolved for the present to say nothing about the matter to her aunt or Miss De Vellembie, but she would take Charles Wilford entirely into her confidence. She had a strong reliance on his steady friendship and manly common-sense.

So thinking, she put on her hat and shawl, and resolved to take a little walk before breakfast, hoping that the fresh air would restore colour to her cheeks and tone to her nerves. She had not gone far along the street when she met Wilford, who was beginning his work early, like a conscientious tourist.

"What, out already!" he cried, as soon as he saw her. "I thought all my lady companions were still dreaming of yester-

day's perils, and that at breakfast I should enjoy the invidious privilege of making the whole place well-known and uninteresting to my friends before they saw it; and now——” Here he broke off and fixed his eyes upon her face. “Why, Monica,” he added hastily (ever since he had been more her friend than her lover he often called her by her name)—“Why, Monica, what is the matter? Are you ill? Has anything frightened you?”

“Nothing is the matter with me, but something has happened which has startled and troubled me terribly,” she answered; “and I think you so much my friend that I am going to tell you all about it.” Her voice trembled a little, but her clear eyes sought his trustfully.

“You know I am always glad to do anything for you,” he said, laying a hearty

stress on the last word, and turning his honest face towards her.

They walked on slowly together, and she told him everything, ending with her own resolve. He listened with surprise and anger and sympathy in his eyes.

"You must let me do this instead of you," he said, when she had done.

"No," she answered; "I shall have more power with them both."

"That is true," he said. "Then, if I must not take your place, I will be on the watch to help you," and he pressed warmly her hand.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON THE WATCH.

IT was settled between Wilford and Monica that she should first use all her influence with both Armine and Stella, and that he should add his to hers with Armine, over whom old association might be expected to give him at least some little power. It seemed likely that they were staying in the same hotel with themselves, but, if that morning they had left Luchon, Wilford and Monica would do their utmost to follow and find them. There was every chance of their being

still in the Pyrenees, so this would be no very difficult task. If Armine's uncle and grandmother were concerned in the matter, as appeared probable, both from his meeting with them mentioned in his letters, and from the man's voice which Monica heard call Marani, they would most likely be very unpleasant people to touch.

In her efforts for her friends, Monica might, Wilford thought, be even in some real danger from these Brinkworths ; for if they had really led Armine into such evil as this, they must certainly be very unscrupulous people. The clergyman was therefore thankful to think that he should be near to help and protect her. The uncle had most likely been the more active of the two Brinkworths in working mischief, and Wilford felt that he, as a man, could face him better than Monica, brave

woman though she was. Mrs. Penlewin and Miss De Vellembie should, they resolved, for the present be kept as much as possible in the dark about the matter. It was useless to trouble them sooner than was necessary.

As soon, therefore, as the two ladies had withdrawn upstairs after breakfast, Monica and Wilford summoned the head-waiter, and calling him into a quiet corner of the large *salle à manger*, began to ply him with questions, the object of which was to learn something about Armine and Stella.

What with his overpowering torrent of civility, what with his taste for making his talk a patchwork of French and English words, the *garçon* was by no means very easy to communicate with. When they tried to identify Stella, he threw himself into an attitude and went off into ecstasies

about the many charming demoiselles who frequented the hotel. When they made inquiries with regard to Armine, he would do nothing but pour forth assurances that only gentlemen of the first quality were among the visitors in that house.

At length Monica, in despair, tried what a minute personal description of the two would do. The waiter listened attentively, and while she was still speaking, his eyes and his hands began to talk in a very encouraging way.

"Ah, *ma foi!*" he cried, as soon as she had ended, "I know now who Mademoiselle means, as well as if it was written on the palms of these my two hands. The young lady and gentleman, who have both most ravishing figures, have been staying here for some days. They are always riding and and walking and driving about.

There are with them a middle-aged Monsieur and an old Madame of most venerable appearance."

"Are you sure the gentleman and lady you speak of are like my description?" asked Monica, doubtfully.

"As like, Mademoiselle, as my two legs," answered the *garçon*, casting a loving and admiring glance down at those glories of his nether man.

"Do you know whether the young gentleman and lady are in?" asked Wilford.

"No, Monsieur, they are not. They went off very early this morning with the other gentleman, to make *un petit tour*. I do not know in what direction. But they will be back to-morrow or next day, for the old lady is waiting for them here; and besides, people always return to our hotel, which is the first in the Pyrenees."

"Do you know the names of any of the party?" asked Wilford.

"No, Monsieur, not precisely. I think I should know them if I heard them; but how is it possible for a man who has at this present moment the orders of thirty-seven ladies and twenty-five gentlemen in his head, to remember names?"

"Is Marani the name of the young gentleman?" said Monica.

The *garçon* gave a little assenting caper.

"And is Oakleigh the name of the young lady, and Brinkworth of the elder lady and gentleman?" she went on.

"No, I don't think those are like their names, Mademoiselle."

"Is there anyone in the hotel who would be more likely to know their names than you are?" asked Wilford.

The *garçon* gave a little indignant shrug.

"No, Monsieur," he said. "If I cannot give you information about our visitors, you may be sure no one else can."

"You can tell us the numbers of the rooms occupied by this party, I suppose?" said Monica.

Yes, in that the *garçon* could gratify Mademoiselle with unbounded pleasure, and he did it. There was evidently no more to be got out of him, and so they dismissed him with silver thanks, and he vanished amid a shower of bows.

They then talked over earnestly what they had heard. The fact of the waiter recognizing the name of Marani seemed to prove that the people he spoke of were those they were looking for. It was certainly strange that he should have said the other two names were not the right ones; but it was quite likely that the Brinkworths and

Stella might, for purposes of their own, have taken feigned names, and quite possible, also, that the waiter might be mistaken.

When Monica saw Armine and Stella that morning in the *salle à manger* they must have been just about to start. They must have come in there while waiting for their carriage, and, finding the room empty, have improved the time accordingly. It must have been the voice of the uncle that disturbed them.

As they were certainly not coming back before to-morrow, there was nothing more to be done that day. They might, it is true, have attacked old Mrs. Brinkworth, but they foresaw that the only result of such a course would be, first a scolding-match, which it would not be very edifying for either a clergyman or a lady to be

engaged in, and then a strong effort on her part to prevent their seeing either Armine or Stella. They mixed up Stella thus, as well as Armine, in their thoughts with the Brinkworths, because, though in past days she had never, to their knowledge, even heard the names of Armine's relations, everything seemed now to prove that she must, in some inexplicable manner, have become closely connected with them.

This enforced inactivity was very painful to Monica. Wilford, with his man's strength of body and man's philosophy, could go off for a long walk among the mountains and busy his mind with his butterfly-net, and with distant peaks, and (anxious though he was at heart) could leave for the present the morrow to take care of itself.

But Monica (this woman whom some

people called masculine, because she did not think about everything quite as other women did)—Monica longed, in a most truly womanly way, to begin her work, and to feel that suspense, at least, was over. What with being up very late last night after a long, tiring journey, and what with the violent emotions of the morning, she felt weak and nervous in a degree with her very unusual, and thus she could not give her restless mind any relief by bodily exercise. Wilford offered to shorten his walk, that she might go with him; but she was forced to confess herself only equal to a stroll in the afternoon. Finding that he could do nothing for her, the Rector bade her take care of herself, in that hearty, brother-like tone he now generally used with her; and then he took his stick and strode away, while Monica, with a weary

sigh, left the *salle à manger* to go upstairs.

A party having left that morning she had been able to change her room, and had now got one on the second *étage*, near the two elder ladies. Just then she remembered that she had asked some of her friends in England to write to her at this very hotel at Luchon. In the bustle of arrival last night she had not thought of her letters, and the events of this morning had driven them yet more out of her head. Now, however, recollecting them, and glad of anything to divert her mind, she went to the table in the hall of the hotel, where were ranged the letters which had not yet been claimed by any visitor. There were two addressed to her in the well-known handwritings of friends; and glad of the distraction, she went to her own room to read them.

She did not notice that as she picked out her own two letters, an old lady who was passing through the hall paused for a moment behind her, fixed her eyes eagerly upon the address of the envelopes Monica held in her hand, uttered a low interjection, as of one who has found something she was looking for, while a peculiar expression passed over her face, and then hurried upstairs. She went so fast that Monica, who lingered a little when she was at the foot of the stairs, only caught sight of her dress disappearing round the corner at the top, and in those respectable grey skirts naturally enough suspected no shadow of guile.

Nor did Monica guess that, as she went along the passage to her room, that same old lady, together with a man and a woman, watched her pass through a half-open door,

and that each of those three pair of eyes took an exact photograph of her.

The fact was, that ever since they first knew Monica Midhurst to be an intimate friend of Frederick Oakleigh and his wife, both Norman Brinkworth and his mother had been haunted with an uncomfortable fancy that she might come out to the south of France and spoil their game. They had no reason to think that she knew anything of their proceedings, but guilt is always suspicious. Besides, the mere fact of her letters to Mrs. Oakleigh remaining unanswered might, they knew, make Monica fear that all was not going well with her friend. These ideas had made them keep incessantly on the watch, and since they left their Argelès Villa to make a little tour among the Pyrenees with their two young companions, they had made a

practice daily, in every hotel they stopped at, of looking over the letters that were waiting for visitors not yet arrived, under pretence of expecting to find some of their own, but in reality thinking that there was a chance of their seeing one addressed to Monica Midhurst. They also observed very narrowly all their fellow-travellers, and learnt as much as they could about them.

These precautions had yesterday borne good fruit, for they had found Monica's two letters. This discovery had given them at once satisfaction and uneasiness; satisfaction at being thus forewarned, uneasiness at the certainty that their enemy was near.

The mother and son at once held an anxious privy-council, during which their subtle brains spun out a plan which would, they

hoped, prevent Monica's acting in any way contrary to them. It was settled that very early next morning Norman should leave Luchon with the two young people, ostensibly to make a short trip of two or three days, and then return thither, and that Mrs. Brinkworth should stay behind, under pretext of not feeling quite well. Norman fixed exactly where he should stop each night, and promised to keep to this itinerary without fail, so that his mother would be able to write to him, to tell him how things were going on, and to direct his further movements. It might be well for him and his companions to come back to Luchon, or it might not.

Fortunately for the Brinkworths' designs, Clovis and Madelon Marron, who had been their accomplices in all the evil they had done, happened to be now in the neighbour-

hood of Luchon. Clovis had had a small estate left him near that town, and he and his wife had come up from Pau to attend to certain legal arrangements about their new property. They had had to ask the permission of the Brinkworths for making this journey, and so Norman and his mother knew exactly their whereabouts.

As soon as they had formed their scheme with regard to Monica, Mr. and Mrs. Brinkworth sent for the Marrons, told them in what way they were now to serve them, and made them stay in the hotel in the character of their servants; their real office, however, was to help the old lady in watching for Monica.

All these arrangements had so far been carried out prosperously. Norman had left early with his two charges, and Mrs. Brinkworth and her two auxiliaries had

begun to mount guard. The heap of unclaimed letters was, of course, the object most jealously watched by them, and all that morning the three had in turns, on one pretence or another, been prowling about in the hall of the hotel. Mrs. Brinkworth could not of course be so active a spy as the other two, but still she had been the successful one, for she had seen a lady take the letters directed to Monica Midhurst. She had then hastened upstairs, and she and her accomplices had minutely observed Monica through the open door. Miss Midhurst passed slowly, looking at her letters, and so unconsciously gave them a better opportunity.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL, BLENHEIM HOUSE.





